

THE  
MISSING  
PARTNERS



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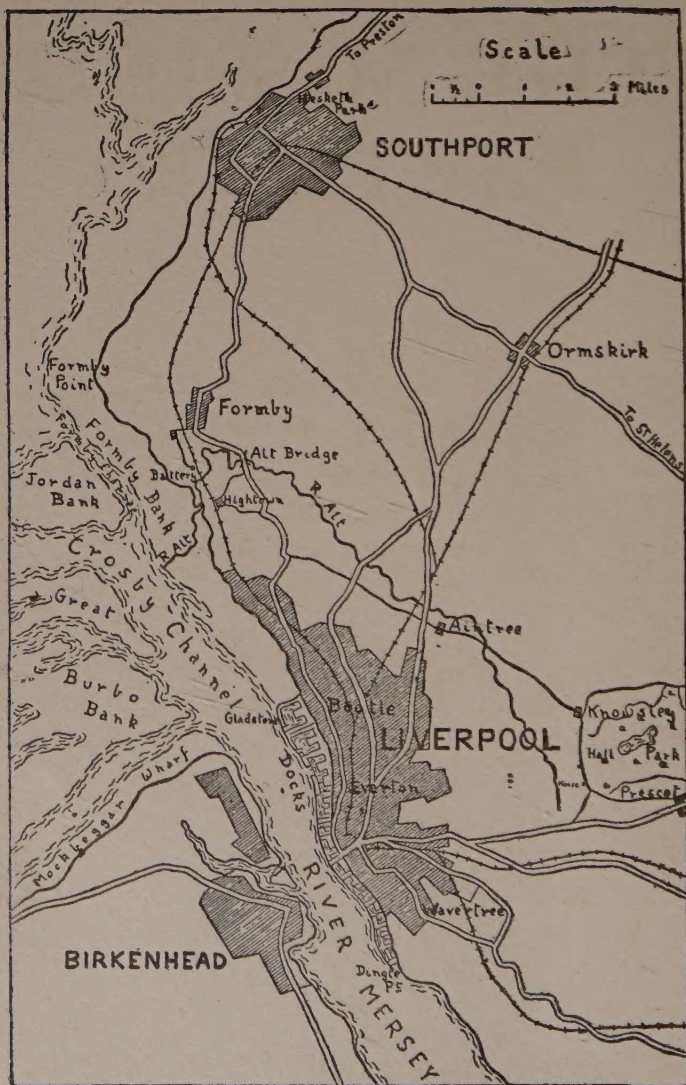




**THE MISSING PARTNERS**









# THE MISSING PARTNERS

BY  
HENRY WADE

AUTHOR OF  
THE VERDICT OF YOU ALL



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## CHAPTER I

### "ADVENTURE—LOVE—CRIME"

THE clear light of a hunter moon, veiled and revealed by drifting clouds, struck fitfully down upon the huge forms of forest trees. A wide clearing in the forest allowed the light to strike upon the stems which, massive in girth and arrow-straight, rushed up into the dark mass of downward-sweeping branches. Across the open space lay dense shadow, black and impenetrable, only the barbed tops silhouetted against the sky identifying the presence of another bank of giant conifers.

In the clearing itself, just short of the mass of shadow, the light fell upon the figure of a horse, saddled and bridled, with reins trailing on the ground. The animal's hanging head, its widespread legs, every line of its body, revealed the fact that it had travelled fast and far. Except for the gently heaving flanks it was motionless, instinctive nature teaching the urgent need to conserve every ounce of energy, to recreate the strength and vital force essential for the service of its master. Rest it needed, long and undisturbed. But it

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was not to be. Suddenly the animal's head was flung up, the ears pricked, the whole body galvanized into eager life. The next moment a man burst from the forest, half-carrying, half-dragging a young girl whose hatless head and white face gleamed in the moonlight. Reaching the horse, the man stopped and turned to his companion. The light revealed a face of great beauty—short, straight nose; dark eyes; low, straight brows; dark curling hair; the lips perhaps a trifle full, but bold and daring. For a second their lips met in a passionate kiss; then the man vaulted into the saddle, dragged the girl up in front of him, and the noble animal, leaping forward under the pressure of his master's heels, dashed at full gallop down the glade.

Not a moment too soon. Out into the clearing rushed two men in rough riding-kit, wild of aspect, fierce of eye. Seeing their quarry disappearing, they flung up clenched fists in an ecstasy of execration, then emptied rifle and revolver vainly after the flying figures. The young man turned a laughing face towards them, waved a triumphant hand, and emplanting another passionate kiss upon the fair nape of his companion's neck . . .

"Oh," gasped Miss Helen Mildmay. "Isn't he wonderful! Oh, I think he's too lovely!"

A grunt from the semi-darkness beside her was her only answer.

Ten minutes later, as twin curtains drew slowly across the two clasped figures silhouetted against the

cloud-veiled moon, and the lights flickered up in the great cinema-palace, Miss Mildmay withdrew the hand that she had just discovered to be reposing in that of a young man on her left.

“I never told you you might do that,” she said.

“I didn’t,” said the young man with a smile.

The girl frowned and her lips parted again, but, as if realizing the weakness of her case, she checked herself and half turned away from her companion. Her nature, however, was neither sullen nor coy and she soon turned back again with a smile.

“Well, anyway, Tom,” she said, “he is ripping, isn’t he? He rides simply wonderfully and he’s awfully good-looking.”

“Beastly Dago,” growled Tom Fairbanks.

“Oh, shut up, Doug; you’re jealous. Just because nobody raves about your silly old stunts any longer you crab every decent-looking actor on the films.”

“Look here, Helen; if you call me ‘Doug’ again, I shall—I shall—oh, I don’t know what I shall do, but you know I hate it. But you’re right about my being jealous—I can’t stick hearing you crack up these oily South American bounders that aren’t fit to look at you. I want you . . .”

“Tom, you’re rather a dear,” said Helen firmly, “but you mustn’t get sloppy. I’m not in love with you, but even if I was it wouldn’t make any difference to my passionate adoration of young gods who can ride and dance and look like that. And if ever I do love

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you, you'll be perfectly welcome to go Gish-gazing all over Liverpool."

This rather intimate conversation was carried on in undertones during the interval that allowed of the projection of "Coming Events," "Tea, Coffee, Chocolate," and "Soda Fountain" announcements upon the screen. Not that that very modern young woman, Helen Mildmay, would have minded much if it had been spoken into microphones destined to broadcast it over the British Isles, but her companion was of a more retiring disposition—and welcomed, moreover, the excuse for putting his head rather closer than usual to the fair curls of Helen.

"I don't dance so badly," he said, "and I dare say I could ride and fight pretty well if I had a chance."

"Pooh," said Helen, rather unkindly. "Pretty sight a little rate-collector's clerk would look on a broncho."

"Don't be a little beast—and he's not a rate-collector, he's His Majesty's Inspector of Taxes."

"God save the King. Amen," said Helen. "It's easy enough to sit there and say how brave you'd be. I bet if I tested you you'd crumple up quick enough."

"I wouldn't. I'd do anything for you. I'd—I'd give my life for you. I'd go to the other end of the world if you just said you wanted a flower from there. I'd give my soul to have a chance of rescuing you from something."

"Thanks awfully. So I'm to get into a hole just to give you a chance of pulling me out again. Well,



you’re not likely to have to. Your little lot is cast in lovely Liverpool for the rest of your days and there aren’t many rough-necks knocking about here for you to rescue me from. Oh, no, you’re quite safe, Sir Thomas; your knightly prowess will be put to no test by this damsel.”

“Don’t be so jolly sure about that,” said Tom, with some warmth. “There are plenty of bad lots about Liverpool and not so far from your precious shipping crowd, either.”

“What . . . ?”

“‘Ush!’” said a voice behind them. “It’s ‘im.”

They looked towards the screen. A black animal of some kind, with a frown on its face, was pacing up and down on its hind legs beside a perambulator, from which protruded a large baby’s bottle.

“Ow, isn’t ‘e lovely! Ow, look at Felix, do, dearie,” said the voice.

An hour or so later, when the two emerged from the great Palace Cinema into the chill of the March night, Helen returned to the point in their conversation at which the arrival of the immortal Felix had interrupted her.

“What were you getting at about there being bad lots in ‘my shipping crowd’—you surely don’t mean in Morden and Morden, do you?”

Tom Fairbanks was silent for a minute. He had said rather more than he meant to, or at any rate than he ought, and he was wondering whether to gloss it

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over or to follow up the awkward subject now that it was broached. He was influenced in the decision he took by two facts; in the first place, Helen Mildmay was not the girl to be easily put off once her curiosity had been aroused; in the second, here was an opportunity to get information that he really wanted. For Helen was secretary to the very man to whom he was referring. Still, it was thin ice and he must skate warily.

"Oh, well," he said, "'bad lot' is putting it rather strongly, perhaps, but there's something jolly fishy about your Mr. James Morden."

"What on earth are you getting at?"

"Well, don't take it down in writing and use it in evidence against me, but *I* think he's falsifying his income tax returns."

Tom might have added that his chief, the Inspector of Taxes, thought the same, but he was wise enough not to say so.

"How do you mean, 'falsifying his income tax returns'?"

"Why, making out that his income is different—less—than what it really is. Of course, it's a bit difficult to judge how much a chap's really got, but with practice one can make a fairly close shot at it. Now, your Mr. James has been returning a pretty modest income for the last four or five years—going down every year it's been—but he doesn't seem to dock his home comforts much—in fact, one would say that he was jolly

well off. He's got that house out at Knowsley—ten or a dozen bedrooms, I should think, and five or six servants. His wife's turned out about as well as anyone in Liverpool—no shortage there. He's got a big Armstrong and she drives herself about in a pretty comfortable little two-seater coupé and all the rest of it. Then he still runs his long dogs—got one entered for the Cup this year, they tell me—and I fancy he plays pretty high at the Club. And one doesn't know what other little amusements he may have—bit of a roving eye, I should say myself, but I don't know. Anyway, unless he's living on capital, which isn't likely with a hard-headed Lancashire business man of his age—what is he, forty-five, forty-seven?”

“About that, I should think,” said Helen, who had been listening quietly.

“Forty-five, say. It isn't likely a man like him would live on capital, unless there was some jolly good reason for it—knew he was going to die young, or something like that—and if he isn't living on capital, I should say that his real income was at least twice what he says it is. Of course, I mustn't say what the figures are, that's confidential . . .”

“Oh, that's confidential, is it?” asked Helen with an irony that appeared to be lost on Mr. Fairbanks.

“Yes, I can't quote figures, but broadly that's the position as I see it. There's something funny somewhere, or I'm a Dutchman.”

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"But how can he give a false return—your tax collector man gets the firm's accounts, doesn't he?"

"Oh, yes, we get the accounts. And as far as they go we can check them. But that's not quite the same thing as the private accounts of the partners—Mr. James and Mr. Charles Morden. Of course, we see what they get out of the business, and, of course, everybody knows that the business has been going down since the War—or rather since the '21 boom—but though that's straightforward enough, there's no proof that one or both of them isn't getting income from somewhere else, which he's concealing. He may have come in for money that we haven't heard about; he may have got some side line—some other business—though that would be pretty difficult to conceal—he may be getting paid for something—he might even be blackmailing somebody. There are lots of different ways he might be getting money and if he doesn't choose to reveal them it's jolly difficult for us to catch him out."

"But you could find out from his banking account how much he's got."

"I dare say we could, but they wouldn't tell us. We couldn't get access to the bank's books without a warrant or an order of the court, and we could only get that if we had definite proof of fraud. And then it wouldn't be easy."

There was silence for a time as the two walked on through the emptying streets. Both were evidently



thinking over the uncomfortable subject that Tom Fairbanks had raised. Helen was the first to break the silence, and her voice was rather cold.

“Are you by any chance suggesting that the business is fraudulent—that we cook our accounts, or anything of that kind?”

“No, no,” declared Tom hastily. “Of course, I’m not—not for a minute. I’m only talking about one of the partners. By the way, who does make up the firm’s accounts—does your father?”

“Yes, father does them now. There used to be an accountant—Mr. Vaseley—but since things have gone so badly they’ve had to cut down the staff a good deal, so now father does the accounts as well as being manager—or rather, he’s responsible for them—he’s got a junior clerk who does most of the actual work of keeping the accounts.”

“I see,” said Tom. “Well, anyhow, he’d know quick enough if there was anything wrong. And I don’t see quite how anything could be wrong to that extent—your auditors would find it out. No, it’s some private game of James Morden’s. Of course, his cousin—or whatever he is—may be in it, too, though he lives quietly enough. Uninteresting sort of chap, isn’t he—never seems to go anywhere or do anything? ‘Still waters run deep,’ though—he may be in it up to the neck for all I know. What d’you think, Helen? Is Charles Morden a straight sort of chap or is he doing the dirty on us, too?”

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If Tom Fairbanks had seen his companion's face during his last remarks he would have been better prepared to meet the tornado that suddenly burst upon his guileless head.

"Look here, Mr. Peeping Tom or Nosey Parker, or whatever you think you are," cried Helen Mildmay, "if you think you're going to pump me about my employers you're damn well mistaken. Is that why you've been taking me out to cinemas—to try and worm things out of me for your nasty, spying, sneaking tax-collector? Oh, how odious of you! I'd rather die than go to a show with you again. I wish to goodness I'd never seen you!"

And a very bewildered young man suddenly found himself standing alone in a nearly empty street, watching the rapidly retreating form of his late companion. But Tom Fairbanks, though a young ass in many ways, was not fool enough to let the girl get away from him in her present mood without at least an attempt to put himself right in her eyes. In any case, it was his job to see her safely home—the streets of Liverpool were no place for a pretty girl to be alone in at nearly midnight. Besides, in her anxiety to retreat effectively from him, she was going in exactly the opposite direction to her home. In a few seconds Tom was by her side and was begging her, with a very wise humility, to forgive him.

"I didn't mean to pump you, Helen, honestly I didn't," he said humbly. "I quite see that it might

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look like that, and it was rotten of me to ask you questions about your people. I thought at first that you were interested and I suppose I went too far or something. Please forgive me, Helen dear; I am most awfully sorry.”

It is difficult to resist a really humble and generous apology; and Helen herself was a generous and even-tempered girl. She was already rather ashamed of her outburst and was prepared to meet Tom half way. But she was woman enough to make the most of the advantage that Tom’s attitude gave her.

“All right, old chap,” she said. “I’ll forgive you and I’m sorry if I said anything a bit too strong myself, but if we’re to be friends you must drop your ‘shop’ when you’re with me,” and she held out a forgiving hand. Tom seized it, more hopelessly and abjectly her slave than ever.

“Helen, you’re a darling. No, you really are. It’s simply ripping of you to forgive me so generously. Helen, I do l . . .”

“That’ll do, young fellow,” said Helen crisply, “forgiving you doesn’t mean falling in love with you, you know. Look here it’s getting jolly late and where on earth have we wandered to?”

Helen Mildmay and her father lived in a small semi-detached villa on the outskirts of Liverpool, beyond Wavertree. It was a long tram ride from the cinema, but Helen and Tom usually walked the first mile or so on these occasions to clear their lungs. To-night,

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in the course of their argument, they had wandered rather too far north and in order to recover their direction they had to strike south and cross Prescott Street, one of the main traffic routes from the city to the east. At this late hour—it was about half past eleven—the street was practically empty, but as they crossed it, a small two-seater came rapidly along from the centre of the city. As it passed them they looked idly at its single occupant and then both gave a gasp of surprise.

"Well, I'm dashed," said Tom. "Isn't that an odd coincidence! Where on earth is Mr. Charles Morden going to at this time of night?"

"No business of ours, anyway," said Helen rather curtly, and Tom, having been once bitten, held his peace. They finished their walk in silence, but the late hour, the solitude, the dim starlight, his companion's late generous forgiveness of himself, or a combination of all four (and the thirty-first of March was very nearly spring time) were too much for young Fairbanks' romantic feelings.

As they parted at the low garden gate of "Rose Lawn" he gently possessed himself of Helen's hand.

"Darling Helen," he said. "I do love you so. Don't you think you could love me a little bit?"

For a moment he thought—poor foolish optimist—that she was pondering over her reply to this momentous question. Then he realized that, though her hand remained in his, she was not listening to him—she was,

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in fact, thinking of something else—and thinking with a look in her eyes, soft and yet anxious, which vaguely disturbed him. Suddenly a burst of light seemed to flood his soul.

“Helen,” he cried, “you’re not—I believe you’re in love with Charles Morden!”

“Oh,” cried Helen, coming very abruptly to her senses. “How dare you say such a thing! Oh, I hate you, I hate you!” She stamped her foot, slammed the gate and ran down the short path to the front door. But as she hurriedly pushed the key into the Yale lock there was a sparkle in her eyes that would, had he seen it, have both puzzled and disturbed poor Tom. Was it caused by tears or by laughter? Did it bode well for him, or ill?



## CHAPTER II

### MORDEN AND MORDEN

THE firm of Morden and Morden, by which both Helen Mildmay and her father were employed, was one of the last remaining family ship-owning businesses left in England. Started by two enterprising young brothers, Charles and John Morden, in the early 'fifties at a time when, as a result of the industrial revolution, the carrying trade of Britain was on a rapid up-grade, it had had, until the end of the Great War, a modest but increasingly prosperous career. Beginning at first with two small brigs which plied between Liverpool, Bordeaux, and Lisbon, the brothers had rapidly developed their business, first extending their reach to the Canary Islands and then casting across the Atlantic to the West Indies and the southern states of the American Republic. Being naturally enterprising, they had been among the first to discard wind for steam, and being also adventurous, they had taken advantage of the Civil War to double their income by running cargoes of precious gun-powder and boots to the hard-pressed Confederates.

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Engrossed in the toil and excitement of their business, neither had thought of matrimony until fairly late in life, when increasing prosperity suggested to them the advisability of heirs and successors. John, the younger, had been the first to marry and had achieved two children, a girl born in 1875 and a boy, James, born in 1881. Charles, the more masterful and more particular of the two, delayed his choice of a wife until the arrival of his brother's son spurred him to take action. He thereupon married the daughter of a Non-conformist minister, who, early in 1882, presented him with an heir, but, neither mother nor son surviving the ordeal, Charles found himself a still childless widower. For a while he buried himself in work, but a slight stroke warned him that his time was limited. In something like a panic he cast about him for a new consort (the word was still fashionable), but he was now an obstinate and self-willed old man and he discovered to his intense surprise and annoyance that no woman whom he considered worthy of himself would look at him. Realizing as a result of a second stroke that it was now too late to provide himself with a son of his own, he adopted as his heir a young nephew of his late wife, and this youngster, possessing already the name of Charles, became by Royal Licence Charles Morden Junr. and, in 1895, by reason of a third stroke, plain Charles Morden.

John Morden survived until 1906 and on his death his son James, then aged twenty-five, came into sole

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control of the business, his cousin and prospective partner, Charles, being at that time a sixteen-years-old schoolboy. Although, under the blessings of Free Trade, the country's carrying trade was still increasingly prosperous, James soon found that the competition of the great shipping companies was pressing the small private concerns very hard, and he and Charles, who had joined him in 1910, were seriously considering the advisability of forming the business into a company, when the outbreak of the Great War completely revolutionized the prospects of the firm. Taken over by the Government at an annual rental nearly equal to its total value, the Morden fleet served its country for four years and, losing only two vessels, was returned to the firm, with full compensation, at the beginning of 1919. Replacing the lost ships with two cheaply-bought German captives, Morden and Morden faced the dawning era of peace and prosperity with renewed confidence.

It is true that Charles, whose character was naturally more closely allied to that of his grandparent, the Moderate Baptist, than to that of his adopted father, counselled caution and retrenchment, but James, with the blood of John and old Charles in his veins, would not listen to talk of company-promoting and the boom of 1920 pouring fresh gold into his pockets, seemed to prove him right. Then came the slump. An impoverished world, wrung by jealousy and fears, its currencies in hopeless confusion, could not trade. A

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glut of ships, as a result of prodigious war-building, together with the additional competition of American and Australian state-owned fleets, aggravated the difficulties of the carrying trade. Only the large companies, with heavy reserves of capital to fall back upon, could stand the strain, and Morden and Morden had rapidly to reduce their fleet and personnel until in 1927, when this story opens, but four ships and a skeleton staff remained.

The end of the great industrial troubles of 1926 had, however, brought hope of better times to the commercial world, and when the two Mildmays, father and daughter, arrived at the office on the morning of 1st April they found that the early spring sunshine had introduced a spirit of buoyancy into the usually gloomy building. As if to clinch this tendency to cheerfulness, Herbert Mildmay, office-manager and accountant and general right-hand man of the firm, had hardly sat down at his desk when he was handed a cable from the mate of one of the firm's ships announcing that he had successfully completed his cargo for the return journey from Kingston at an exceptionally favourable rate of freight.

"That'll please Mr. James, my dear," he said, as he handed the form to his daughter. "He's been worried about the *Faery Queen* I know. He thought Lordert wouldn't be able to fill the bill."

"Why, father?"

"Well, it's not too easy. You see, Wisharts have got

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another ship working on that line now, and the sugar crop was a failure, so that cargoes take a bit of looking for. And, between you and me, Mr. James hasn't a very high opinion of Lordert."

"Oh, but I thought he was the best we'd got. Mr. Charles thinks no end of him, I know."

Mr. Mildmay waged a playful finger.

"Ah, Mr. Charles, Mr. Charles! You think Mr. Charles is a mine of wisdom, don't you, my dear? Well, he's pretty sound, I'll say that for him. Lordert's his sort, of course—cautious, not likely to jump at a flashy offer, but thorough. Oh, yes, I dare say Lordert's all right, but we can't do with too much caution in these days—we must take a risk or two if we're going to get business."

Herbert Mildmay, a small, mild-looking man, had himself the reputation of being cautious to a degree, both in his own affairs and those of his employers, but he had served Morden and Morden for thirty-five years and he would not have been human if he had not had a sneaking admiration for the spirit of adventure which had carried the two brothers so far and which was still evident in the elder of the two present partners in the firm. But if he allotted a small degree of admiration to James Morden it was of negligible proportions, for the whole of his admiration and love were centred upon his adored daughter. For twenty years, ever since his meek little wife had put into his arms the small and ugly babe that was her farewell gift to him, Helen had

been the heart and centre of Herbert Mildmay's life. It was a source of perpetual wonder to him that two such insignificant people as he and Mary Harper could have brought into the world a creature so lovely, so intelligent, so exquisite as this enchanting daughter of his. All the money that he could save from his generous salary—and his personal requirements were small—was spent upon her upbringing. Her nurse, her governess, her school, her technical college, even her clothes, would not have disgraced the daughter of one of his employers, and it was almost with regret that he had consented to her entering the employment of the firm in which he himself served.

As for Helen, she loved her father in an impersonal friendly sort of way. She was sufficiently grateful to him for all he had done for her; she looked after him as well as her modern education enabled her to, and she was dutiful and obedient whenever it was convenient to be. For the rest, she ordered her life according to her own judgment and experience, had her own latchkey, and was very well able to take care of herself. She had an exceptionally attractive appearance, a large heart, and many friends; she was generous, frank, and self-centred. Of her friends, Tom Fairbanks was at the moment, perhaps, the most favoured, but she had no notion whatever of being in love with him. She had in fact, no intention of being in love with anyone. But love is an unaccountable affliction—"in the midst of life we are in—love."



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On the morning of the first of April, therefore—ignoring the significance of the date—Helen spent a considerable portion of her employers' time in pondering, rather more soberly than was her wont, over the occurrence of the previous night. She had flown into a passion when poor Tom spoke slightly of Charles Morden, she had burst into tears when he made his absurd accusation about her loving him. Why she should have done so she could not imagine. Perhaps it was some ridiculous spring-madness that had attacked her—a sort of March Hare effect. Certainly she did like Charles Morden. She saw a good deal of him, because she acted as his secretary as well as his cousin's and as she detested James it was only natural that Charles should benefit by the rebound. And she respected his judgment. But it had never occurred to her to love him.

That she was able to devote so much time this morning to reflection upon her own feeling was due to two facts. In the first place, the mail she had to deal with was an unusually light one and was soon disposed of or ready for submission to one or other of the partners; in the second, neither of those partners had yet sent for her to take them their papers or to make shorthand notes of their own imaginings.

At half-past eleven her father came into the small cubicle that served her as an office.

"Did Mr. James say anything to you about when he would be in this morning, my dear?" he asked.

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Helen shook her head.

"Or Mr. Charles?"

Again a negative.

"Its odd that they should both be so late. A bit awkward, too. There are one or two matters I want to get a decision about. That Bolten Cotton Goods claim—we ought to make up our minds one way or the other about that—we don't want them to take that into court. And the Seaman's Union are pressing us about the Wopple case. I suppose one of them'll be in soon—it's very . . ." He went out grumbling.

Half an hour later he was back again.

"My dear, ring up Mr. James's house, will you, and ask if he's coming in this morning. I don't like bothering him at his house, but Mr. Charles not having the 'phone in his rooms—I've spoken to him several times about having it and he said he would, but he hasn't—and I must answer the N.U.S.F. something to-day."

Mr. Mildmay could quite well have rung up from his own room, but, apart from the fact that he liked to have little things like this done for him, he was incurable shy of any dealings with the private life of the upper classes (as he pictured them). The idea of speaking, even on the telephone, to that superb being, Mrs. James Morden, flatly appalled him.

Helen had no such qualms. She pulled the telescopic telephone towards her and took off the receiver.

"Knowsley 7, please. Hullo! Knowsley 7? Mor-

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den and Morden speaking. Can I speak to Mr. James Morden, please? Miss Mildmay. Oh, is that Mrs. Morden? Good morning, Mrs. Morden. Can . . . ? Oh, at the club? Thank you; I'll try there. Good morning."

"Slept at the club last night, she says. Sly old fox, I'll bet he didn't." ("Sh-sh," ejaculated the scandalized Mr. Mildmay, fearful of junior clerical ears.) "Well, anyway, he's not at Knowsley and hasn't been since yesterday. Shall I ring up the club?"

She did so and a minute later turned to her father with a triumphant air.

"I told you he didn't! He's been out on the tiles, the old rip. Ugh, he's not my choice for a *petit ami*—still, it takes all sorts to make the world go round."

"Helen, really, I must ask you . . ."

"All right, father, keep your hair on. 'My strength is as the strength of ten, because I don't do all I talk about.' Shakespeare! Now where are we to go for honey?"

Mr. Mildmay sighed.

"I know you don't mean half you say, dear, but you do give a very odd impression. I suppose we must just wait. I'll send the boy round to Mr. Charles's rooms."

Half an hour later Robert Gurge, office boy, returned with news that even then flicked a stir of excitement through the office and was destined to send his name humming over the invisible waves of the ether, thrilling

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the curious world for more than the nine days of tradition. Mr. Charles Morden was not at his rooms, he had not slept there, he had left in his car in a great hurry some time after eleven the previous night, taking some luggage, and had not since returned.

"'Is rooms is in an orful stew, the old girl—the landlady that is, sir—says. Clothes turned out all over the shop, papers burnt in the grate, an' all the rest of it. *It's my belief* (these pregnant words were broadcast verbatim) *'e's done a bunk.*"

## CHAPTER III

### MILDMAY AND MILDMAY

THE startling news brought by Gurge, though its full significance was not at the time realized, naturally put Mr. Mildmay into a state of considerable commotion. As was usual with him in times of distress, he fell back for support upon the calmer and more confident judgment of his daughter. Both his own room and the secretary's cubicle being liable to constant intrusion, he took Helen into Charles Morden's room and sat down nervously in the latter's desk chair.

"My dear, what are we to do? If only Mr. James would come. Where can Mr. Charles have gone to? What shall we . . . ? Ought I to . . . ?"

"Steady on, father; don't get rattled," said Helen calmly. "There may be nothing in all this—very likely Mrs. Plummet and that young monkey, Gurge, have been piling it on. Still, it is a bit odd."

She paused for consideration.

"Let's go through the alternative courses of action. Here, I'll jot them down on paper.

"(a) Do nothing. That's weak and dull.

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- (b) Ring up the police. Exciting, but premature.
- (c) Draw Liverpool for Mr. James. There are lots of places where he might be. We could do it by 'phone and personally. Sound, but he mightn't like it.
- (d) Go and consult Mrs. James. Don't know much about her, but I should say she had her head screwed on all right.
- (e) Consult Mr. Turnbull. Solicitors are supposed to know all the family secrets, aren't they?
- (f) . . . That's about all I can think of at the moment."

A further pause of about thirty seconds for more mature consideration. Then:

"I vote for (d) in the first place. This looks like a family affair at the moment, and perhaps we ought not to broadcast it. I'll get on to Mrs. Morden and see if she'll come here—if not, you or I must go there."

She jumped off the table on which she had been half sitting.

"Look here, before we do anything else we must stop the office talking. The only way to stop Gurge will be to lock him in the strong room. You see to that, while I ring up Mrs. James." And without waiting to hear her father's views upon her alternative proposals, Helen marched off to the telephone. Two minutes later she was back, looking rather important.

"She wants me to go and meet her. Got her head



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screwed on all right, as I said. I didn't tell her much, because the exchange people listen in like anything, but she spotted that it was something urgent. Said it might be better if she didn't come here, as it would make the clerks talk, and is going to pick me up outside the Royal and take me somewhere in her car—says we can talk all right in that—it's a coupé. I wonder if she knows anything—she didn't seem much surprised or much interested when I told her that we were rather worried about Mr. Morden not coming in. Just said she's got to come into town anyhow and would I go and meet her at the Royal? I asked if she wouldn't rather see you, but she said, no, she'd rather talk to me if I knew what it was about. Hope you don't mind, father."

From the expression on Mr. Mildmay's face it was not clear whether he was most hurt at this apparent slight to the dignity of his position, or relieved at not having to talk to Mrs. Morden.

"Very well, my dear," he said, "if Mrs. Morden prefers to see you, I suppose there's no more to be said. But I think she should consult me before taking any definite action. After all, in the absence of the partners I am the responsible head of the firm." Dignity held momentary sway, then affection and pride in his daughter resumed their customary position. He patted Helen's hand. "There, there, dear. I know you'll manage it all very nicely, much better than your poor old father would, I expect."

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Helen planted a grateful kiss on his forehead, and made for the door.

"I'd better be off," she said. "It won't take her long to run in from Knowsley. I wish I'd put on my blue this morning." And she was gone.

Mr. Mildmay remained sitting in Mr. Charles's chair. With the departure of his daughter the light seemed to have gone out of his eyes. He looked careworn, almost haggard, as if he was overweighted by the responsibility of his position. Perhaps he had a foreboding of all the trouble that lay before himself and his firm.

Lilith Morden had been married for about seven years and was childless. The daughter of a London stockbroker of sporting tendencies, named Fortnum, she had been brought up in an atmosphere of decided comfort, if not actual luxury, and of considerable social gaiety. Her father had died soon after her marriage, leaving, to the intense surprise and annoyance of his family, little but debts, and Lilith's dowry had not been so noble as to compensate her for this disappointment. Still, her husband gave her a very good allowance and, though Liverpool society was not as amusing as that of Wimbledon, she was able to dress well and keep herself from being seriously bored. In this her looks were a great help to her. She was tall and slim, with a figure that was in post-war fashion and fair hair that shingled neatly, and though her husband, in moments of expansion, sometimes said that he wished there

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was a bit more of her to get hold of, she had no lack of admirers ready to give her as good a time as she would let them.

Helen Mildmay had only seen her very occasionally—she never came to the office—and her impression of her was rather hazy. She knew she was pretty and well-dressed and she thought she was clever, but she had a feeling that there was something lacking—some warmth or sympathy, perhaps—the lack of which rather marred the perfection of the picture. It was with considerable interest, therefore, that she waited outside the Royal Hotel, wondering whether the closer view that the interview before her would afford would remove or heighten the impression that she had formed.

Mrs. Morden was commendably punctual—that is to say, she did not keep Helen waiting more than ten minutes.

“Jump in, Miss Mildmay,” she said crisply. “I’ve got to run out to the hospital. We can talk on the way—and in the drive if we haven’t finished. Now, what’s the trouble about my husband and his cousin?”

Helen told her briefly about the non-appearance of the two partners, her failure to get any news of James at the club, and the discovery of Charles’s hurried departure. Lilith listened in silence, driving her car with neat precision, but evidently following closely the course of the narrative. By the time that Helen had finished they had arrived at the hospital and Lilith pulled the

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car up out of the way and turned to her companion.

"What makes you think there's anything odd about my husband not coming to the office this morning? Hasn't he ever missed before?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Morden, but he generally says when he's not coming in. Still, there's nothing particularly odd about that, only it seems funny that neither you nor the Club know where he is. I don't want to be impertinent," she added hurriedly, as a shadow seemed to cross Mrs. Morden's pretty face, "but you asked me why we thought it odd."

"Of course, you're not being impertinent," said Lilith. "I see myself that it's odd. Still, I expect there's some quite simple explanation. He may have gone to London on business—he does fairly often, of course. I don't know about Charles—I'm not my brother-in-law's keeper," she added with a smile. "He may go off for a jaunt in his car pretty often for all I know—he's a gay young bachelor."

Again that involuntary spasm of anger seemed to shake Helen; this time, however, she remained silent—Lilith Morden was not Tom Fairbanks, and in any case, what did it matter to her?

Mrs. Morden continued:

"I don't quite know what to say. One doesn't want to make a fuss about nothing—Jim would be furious if he came back from London or somewhere this evening and found the police raking the Mersey for his dead body. And it isn't my job to go nosing after

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Charles. Still, your position's rather different—I quite see that it's awkward for you—and particularly, of course, for your father."

She considered for a while.

"Look here," she said, "suppose we leave it till tea-time—say five o'clock. Then, if neither James—my husband—nor Charles has turned up, your father might go round quietly and talk to the Chief Constable—just ask his advice. I know Major Waring quite well and he won't do anything in a hurry. I can't go myself because there's a Primrose League stunt of some kind on at Knowsley Hall this afternoon and my husband would want me to go. Still, perhaps the police ought to know about it fairly soon, in case anything really is wrong. That do, d'you think, Miss Mildmay? All right. What will you do, will you wait? I shall be about twenty minutes, I'm afraid—or perhaps you could get a tram back?"

"Thanks, Mrs. Morden, I will," said Helen, getting out of the car. "Father will be waiting. I'll ring you up at five—or earlier, of course, if either of them comes in."

"I shan't be there at five—still, Parker will tell you whether my husband's come in. Well, good-bye, Miss Midmay, thanks very much. Sorry I can't drive you back."

Lilith Morden went into the hospital. Helen walked towards the tram route. Her impression of her late companion was not materially changed.



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Arrived at the office, Helen found her father in a state of considerable impatience.

"What a time you've been, Nell! What did she say? Look here, I've thought of something else we might do. Where's Mrs. Morden gone?"

"She hasn't gone anywhere particular—just stayed at the hospital—I trammed back. She hasn't really got much to say about it either." Helen repeated to her father Mrs. Morden's views, but kept her impression of that lady to herself. "But what's your bright idea?" she added as she finished.

"The docks. We might enquire there. Mr. James and Mr. Charles both go down fairly often and somebody there may have seen them since we did."

"Not a bad idea," said Helen kindly. "Will you go or shall I?"

"Perhaps I'd better go there, dear. It isn't quite the place for a young girl—they're a rough lot, these dock hands and sailors."

Helen laughed.

"'Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine.' All right, my cautious parent, off you trot and I'll hold the fort. But don't go swapping smutty stories with naughty sailor boys."

Mr. Mildmay blushed.

"Helen, dear, I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"I know, it's so unladylike," replied his unrepentant daughter. "But then you know what we poor typists are."

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Mr. Mildmay, recognizing that the last word was not for him, withdrew from the unequal contest.

The dock used by Morden and Morden lay about two thirds of the way down the wonderful six-mile stretch of docks on the right bank of the Mersey which constitute the Port of Liverpool. From Dingle Point, at the southern end of the City, the great expanse of still-water basins stretches for mile on mile to the very mouth of the river, where, at the northern end of Bootle, the huge new Gladstone system adds the last touch of scientific perfection to this masterpiece of maritime engineering. Nearly seventy separate docks, with thirty miles of quayage and a water area of four hundred and seventy-five acres, go to make up the port on the Liverpool side alone, whilst across the river at Birkenhead lies a further system of seventeen docks, with a quayage of ten miles and a water area of one hundred and sixty-five acres. Varying in size and capacity from the Gladstone docks, with their fifty-six acres of water and quarter-mile quays, their three-story concrete "sheds" and seventy movable cranes, to the little group of obsolete docks near Waterloo Station, the whole system is now controlled by one authority, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board.

The Morden dock, one of the obsolete group already referred to, had originally been built by a private firm and, though it had been taken over by the Docks Board at the end of the last century and condemned to early destruction, it still survived, thanks to the War and

subsequent financial crises, in its original form and was leased to Morden and Morden practically as a private dock. It was a poor affair, compared with its magnificent neighbours, with a bare two hundred yards of quayage, a few poor wooden sheds and but a single crane, but it served the purpose of the firm's diminishing trade and its privacy was a decided asset.

Leaving the firm's offices in a quiet alley off Lord Street, Mr. Mildmay made his way along Castle Street, with its imposing banks, past the four chained negroes of the Exchange and down the steep pitch towards the river. As he looked out over the great muddy stream he could see the sturdy *Daffodil*, once heroine of a naval epic, but now returned once more to her mundane career as ferry boat, chugging placidly across the river towards Birkenhead, whilst out in mid-stream a great Cunarder, dozing in peaceful anticipation of the morrow's rush, swung gently at her anchor. In the foreground, rising side by side in majestic competition, towered the great piles of the Cunard and Liver Buildings and the offices of the Docks and Harbour Board.

But none of these stirring sights passed through the eyes of Mr. Mildmay to his brain, nor, when he reached the dockside road, did his ears record the roar of the overhead railway, so startling to a stranger, nor the rattle and crash of the great horse-drawn flats, with their loads of packing cases and cotton bales, bumping along the cobbled streets. His mind, dulled by usage to these phenomena, was entirely occupied by the

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overwhelming problem which recent events had thrust upon his hitherto quiet life. He walked blindly, habit guiding his steps, and instinct, unconscious but doubly active, guarding him from the rushing perils of the road.

Arrived at the Morden dock, the manager found it in a state of considerable activity. One of the firm's ships, the *S.S. Snark*, was due to sail next day with a mixed cargo to Jamaica and, as usual, a great deal of loading appeared to have been left to the last moment. Along the quay, between the transit shed and the ship, a gang of dockers were trucking an assortment of crates and bundles; beneath the steam crane a smaller party was collecting and roping these into bales, ready to be slung up into the air and down into the gaping hold, where invisible stevedores would sort and store them into balanced order. At the mouth of the hold a foreman signalled with cryptic gesticulations to the craneman, who handled his unwieldy charge with all the quiet deftness that only years of experience can give. The ship herself creaked gently against the side of the quay, as if protesting mildly at these liberties being taken with her inside.

Mildmay found the *Snark's* skipper, Captain Joseph Keeling, standing on the main deck in conversation with a lading clerk. Captain Keeling was a short, dark-complexioned man, with immensely broad shoulders and long arms quite out of proportion with his length of leg. His steel-grey eyes were noticeably

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devoid of expression, and his conversation was, as a rule, no less colourless than his face. He had been known on occasion, however, to express his feelings with apparent fluency. He was accustomed to smoke a black, oily-looking cigar, and at the moment of Mr. Mildmay's rather timid approach he was in the act of directing a consignment of liquid nicotine into the water of the dock.

"Good morning, Captain Keeling," began Mr. Mildmay, touching his bowler hat in a would-be breezy manner. Captain Keeling looked him slowly over, spat overboard again, and nodded.

"Can I have a word with you a minute?"

"I'm here," was the laconic reply.

Mildmay glanced at the lading clerk.

"Er," he said.

Captain Keeling made no comment and, as the lading clerk appeared unwilling to take a hint, Mildmay had to continue his investigation in the young man's presence.

"I wanted to ask you whether you could tell me anything of the whereabouts of Mr. James or Mr. Charles Morden. They have not—er—that is to say (Mildmay glanced again uncomfortably at the clerk, who was engaged with some yellow forms, a stump of pencil, and his tongue)—er—do you happen to have seen either Mr. James or Mr. Charles to-day?"

Captain Keeling's grunt had a negative inflection.

"Or last night?"

"Saw them both last night."

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"Er—what time would that be?"

"About two bells."

"Er—and that would be?"

Captain Keeling continued to smoke in silence.

"I'm afraid I'm very stupid, but I don't quite know what two bells means."

Still silence. Then the clerk came unexpectedly to Mr. Mildmay's aid.

"About nine o'clock, I think that means, Mr. Mildmay."

Mr. Mildmay gave him a glance of gratitude; he was flattered, too, at the young man's recognition of himself.

"Nine o'clock, I see. They had some conversation with you, no doubt. Can you by any chance tell me how long they were here—that is to say, what time they left the dock?"

"Nope. Can't spend my whole day chattering." With which, his longest speech, Captain Keeling turned on his heel and disappeared down the nearest companion.

Mr. Mildmay watched him helplessly.

"He's rather difficult to talk to, isn't he?" he said gloomily.

The clerk laughed.

"I'll try and find the first mate," he said. "He may be able to help you."

The first mate, when found, proved more informative. He had seen the two partners talking to the



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skipper soon after nine. Later he had seen them walking up and down the quay together at some distance from the ship. He had not seen them leave. He and Captain Keeling had, in fact, themselves left the dock at about a quarter past nine, everyone else having also cleared off by that time.

"But doesn't the loading go on all night?" asked Mr. Mildmay, whose knowledge of the business was strictly confined to his own sphere. "There seems to be so much still to be got on board that you'd have to work night and day."

The mate laughed.

"Not if we can help it," he said. "Matter of fact, we were practically loaded yesterday evening. This is only last-minute stuff that always turns up late. No, we were all off by soon after nine yesterday."

"Then nobody can say what time Mr. James and Mr. Charles left?" asked Mr. Mildmay blankly.

"Night-watchman can, I suppose," replied the mate. "Or the watch on board. I'll ask Mr. Raby—oh, no, I can't," he added. "That watch is on shore leave. But the watchman could tell you—he's got nothing much to distract his attention!"

"Oh, thank you. Yes. He won't be here now, of course. I wonder where I could find him. You don't know, of course?"

"No, but one of these chaps probably will. Here, George, or whatever your name is," he called to a gigantic dock hand who was staggering up the gangway

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with a great sea-chest on his shoulders. "D'you know where old Bill—the night-watchman—hangs out?"

The man rested his burden against the bulwarks, added his quota to the waters of the Mersey, and resumed his load.

"Dead Dog Alley," he grunted. "Back o' Paradise Lane."

"That's as near as you'll get, I expect," said the mate. "I don't suppose anyone knows his surname, if he does himself, but anyone in Dead Dog Alley'll tell you where to find him, I don't doubt."

Thanking his two companions, Mr. Mildmay made his way, by a series of directions, to the salubrious neighbourhood of Paradise Lane. An Irish docker, supporting the exterior casing of the "Blue Peter Gin Vaults," directed him at once to his precise destination.

"Number 21 it is, sor, away up on the left. Next door to Mrs. Murphy, the same whose old aunt Ellen died on her last week and left the piano away to a nephew in Canada—more shame to her. Will ye mind yer head into the alley, sor, the beam's a thrifle loose and might discommode ye."

"Er. Thank you. Thank you. Er. Could you by any chance tell me the gentleman's other name?"

"Is it ould Bill's other name ye would be meaning?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, I don't call to mind that I ever heard of his having another name. Unless ye would be calling him Bloody Boko, the same as some of the bhoys

call him. But there, I don't know that I would do that, if I were you."

"No, no. I mean his surname."

"Oh, is it his father's name? Well, I believe I did hear that his mother married a gentleman wid the name of Potts—an outlandish name entoirely."

Content perforce with this information, Mr. Mildmay made his way to No. 21. His knock was followed by the screech of a chair inside and the door was opened by a very small and grubby child. Mr. Mildmay found himself in the immediate presence of "Old Bill" and his family at tea—or breakfast.

"Er, Mr. Potts?" he asked.

The reputed Mr. Potts, with knife and fork erect on each side of a steaming plate of tripe, merely stared, while continuing to masticate.

"Er, Mr. Bill? The night-watchman at Morden's dock?"

Old Bill slowly nodded and added a large potato to his mouthful of tripe.

"Can you tell me whether you saw Mr. Morden—Mr. James and Mr. Charles Morden—at the dock last night? Captain Keeling says they were there about nine."

Old Bill nodded again.

"Ay, ah saw them."

"And can you tell me what time they left?"

"Mr. Charles, he left soon after captain—about half past nine, ah would say."

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"And Mr. James?"

The watchman stopped chewing. A frown appeared upon his face. He lowered the points of his weapons on to the rim of his plate and rubbed the sides of his legs. He looked at his tripe, and from his tripe to his wife. Then he turned his eyes back to his visitor.

"Eh lad, if that's not a caution," he said. "Blowed if ah ever seed 'un leave at all!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### ON THE QUAY

HELEN having heard from her father the disturbing statement of the night-watchman agreed that it was time to refer the whole matter to the police. There might still be a natural and simple explanation of the puzzle, but it had begun to wear too ugly a look to be ignored. A telephone call to Knowsley revealed the fact that Mrs. Morden had already gone to dally with Primrose Dames, but the Mildmays felt that their instructions had been sufficiently wide to justify them in acting on their own discretion. At about four o'clock, therefore, Herbert Mildmay found himself closeted with that awe-inspiring dignitary, the Chief Constable of Liverpool.

In point of fact Major Waring was little concerned with either awe or dignity. He was a plain straightforward man who knew his job and cared not in the least what impression he made upon people while he was doing it. Starting life as a police-constable in the Liverpool Borough Police, he had worked his way up to the rank of Chief Inspector, had taken a commission

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at the outbreak of War in the King's Liverpools, had again risen rapidly to the command of his battalion, and even, for a short period in the stress of battle, to that of a brigade, and on returning at the end of the War had been allowed by a grateful country to retain the rank of major, neither of his higher appointments having been held for the required space of six months. With this varied experience the City Corporation had been glad to get Waring back as a superintendent, and at the earliest opportunity to appoint him Chief Constable.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Mildmay?" he asked.  
"Of course, I know Mr. and Mrs. Morden well."

Herbert Mildmay gave a brief and precise account of the circumstances which were causing him so much concern. The Chief Constable listened without interruption.

"Where did Mr. James Morden dine last night?" he asked when Mildmay had finished.

"I—I don't know, sir," said Mildmay. "I didn't think to enquire. He didn't sleep at his Club, but he may have dined there—I didn't think to ask them that."

"And Mr. Charles?"

Mildmay shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't know."

"Did they often dine together—go about together?" Mr. Mildmay cogitated.

"Well, yes, sir. In the way of business I should say they did go about together a fair amount."



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"But not in their social relations?"

"I should think perhaps not. But I really shouldn't like my opinion to be taken for much on that point, sir." Mr. Mildmay hastened to add, "I really don't know anything about their private lives; I only see them in the office."

"Quite. Well perhaps we'd better go into all this later. We ought to look into this dock story straight away. I take it you want us to investigate this?"

"Well, sir, as I said, I'm rather in a difficult position. I've no one to consult except Mrs. Morden, and she said . . ."

"Yes, yes, you told me that. What you want is for us to look into this quietly without anyone knowing that the police are moving? Is that it?"

"That's it exactly, sir, exactly!" exclaimed Mr. Mildmay gratefully.

The Chief laughed.

"You were afraid we should send squads of police to ransack your premises and then Mr. Morden come back and ask what on earth all the excitement was about!"

Mr. Mildmay smiled feebly.

"Well, we shan't do that. At least not yet. I'll send Superintendent Dodd along with you. You'd better take him down to your dock first just to have a look round." He struck a hand bell. "Ask Mr. Dodd to come here, please," he said to the young constable who answered the summons.

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A minute later, Superintendent Dodd appeared. He was in plain clothes and was a tall, rather stout man, with heavy cheeks, a drooping black moustache, and small eyes. Mr. Mildmay thought him one of the stupidest-looking men he had ever seen. But appearances might be deceptive.

The Chief Constable briefly explained the position to his subordinate, who made no comment, and five minutes later the oddly-assorted pair were out in the street. Superintendent Dodd at once became more human and decisive. His first move was to hail a taxi.

"Not far to walk," he said, "but shorter still to drive. No doubt your time's valuable and mine isn't my own. Besides, it's not safe to talk in the street if you don't want all Liverpool reading it in the *Star* half an hour afterwards. Now, Mr. Mildmay, let's have it again in your own words."

He had it again, but as there was really very little in Mildmay's story beyond the absence of the two partners and the statement of Charles Morden's landlady and of the night-watchman, Dodd was not much the wiser when it was finished. He was about to ask some questions when the taxi pulled up outside the Morden dock. The two men got out and Dodd paid the driver.

"Better have a word with that mate," he said. "He seems to have seen as much as the skipper, and from your account it's waste of breath to talk to him."

The first mate of the *Snark* was on the quay at the

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foot of one of the gangways when Dodd and Mildmay approached the ship, so that there was no need to risk an encounter with the forbidding commander.

Mildmay introduced his companion to the young sailor.

"This is Superintendent Dodd of the Police Force," he said in a confidential undertone. "Don't let it go any further, please, Mr. . . . ?"

"Millet, Rand Millet," said the mate.

"Mr. Millet. We don't want it talked about, but the truth is we're rather uneasy about Mr. James Morden. He seems to have disappeared."

The mate whistled.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "Dirty work?"

"Oh, well, we have no reason to suppose so, but the police want to make some enquiries . . ." He turned to the Superintendent and the latter took up the running.

"You saw the two Mordens together last night, didn't you, Mr. Millet?"

The mate nodded.

"Where were they, and what were they doing when you saw them?"

"They came aboard a bit before nine, I should say, and had a yarn with the old man in his cabin—I don't know what about. Then they went on shore again and seemed to be talking about something to do with the sheds—anyhow, they were walking up and down alongside the farthest one and pointing at it and then at

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the quay beyond it. At least, that was as far as I could make out in that light."

"Ah, that was what I was coming to," said Dodd. "What amount of light is there here at night?"

"Well, there are these big arc lights along the quay—every fifty yards or so, as you see, there's a pole. They give a pretty powerful light, but we only turn on the ones we want. The *Snark's* berthed pretty far up this end, so we only had these two near ones on last night. It was quite light close to the ship, but farther along by the sheds it was pretty murky, and beyond that again it was pitch."

"But you saw them all right when they were pointing at the sheds?"

"I saw them then all right. But before we left—that was about a quarter past nine—they'd gone farther on. I thought they'd left the dock at first; but then I saw them just come into sight by the far shed. Then they turned round and went back into the dark again. I saw them again come into the light and turn away again—it looked as if they were walking up and down, talking about something, but, of course, that's only guess-work."

"And when you left they were still doing that?"

"So far as I know, they were."

"Who else would be likely to have seen them after you?"

"The watch on deck might have, but as I told this gentleman, they're all on shore leave till midnight."

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You could ask them when they come aboard—or I could, if you like. And, of course, the night-watchman would have seen them leave.”

“Is there any other . . . oh, well, we’ll leave that for the moment; we’d better go and have a look along there now.”

The three men walked along towards the mouth of the dock. The quay was about two hundred yards long. Half-way down it there stood four or five sheds, one large, the remainder smaller, used for the storage of goods and of the tackle required for the loading and unloading of ships; one, the smallest, was evidently some kind of office. Beyond the sheds the quay was clear except for some piles of timber, cases, scrap iron and other odds and ends awaiting clearance. A light rail-line, for the travelling crane, ran the length of the quay.

A storeman was working in the small office-shed and at Mildmay’s request he unlocked the larger sheds and switched on the electric light inside them. All of them were very nearly empty—significantly so, thought the Superintendent, who had an inkling of the state of Morden and Morden’s affairs—and it did not take much search to show that there was no sign of the missing man. Superintendent Dodd’s heavy face looked as thoughtful as, probably, it was possible for it to look.

“Could anyone have hidden in these sheds last night?” he asked.

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"Not in the big ones," answered the storeman. "I locked them myself when I went off at seven, and there was no one in them then. In that small end one they could—as you see, it's got an open side. I didn't notice anyone there, but there might have been."

"But Mr. Morden was seen outside long after that . . ." began Mr. Mildmay, but the Superintendent's sour look withered him.

"Whether anyone hid in there or not they couldn't have got out without passing the night-watchman? What's the other side of the fence—another dock?"

"Yes, sir, but nobody could get over that fence without a ladder—there are spikes and barbed wire all the way along," said the storeman.

"And the other side's all water?"

"He might have got away in a boat," suggested the mate, "only he'd have to go through the dockgates then."

"Or swim, eh?" said Dodd. "But why should he? He'd only got to walk out of the gate? Hadn't he, Mr. Mildmay?"

"Of course, yes, of course," stammered the Chief Clerk, whose attention had wandered to the doings of the man loading the *Snark*, on whose deck the squat figure of Captain Keeling was now visible.

"Well, he got away somehow. Though why he shouldn't . . . Anyway, we might just walk down to the end and see if he's sitting with his toes in the water," said Dodd with elephantine humour.



## ON THE QUAY

The three men followed him along the quay, stopping at each pile of lumber to see if anything could be concealed in it. They had nearly reached the end when the Superintendent stopped abruptly.

"Hullo!" he said. "What's this?"

The Morden dock having, as has been said, been built by a private firm, did not connect with the docks on either side of it, but opened direct through its own dock gates into the river. Consequently the quay ran straight down without interruption to the river wall, along which it was possible to walk as far as the dock gates. The surface of the quay was composed of a mixture of cinder and gravel, with here and there a slab of stone, the verge being of timber. For the most part the cinder surface at this end of the quay was more or less smooth, but at the point where Dodd had stopped it had been somewhat disturbed, and two distinct lines, about nine inches apart were scratched along it until it joined the concrete surface of the river wall.

"Stand right away back," said the Superintendent sharply. He knelt and carefully examined the disturbed ground, followed the parallel lines as far as the gravel extended.

"Damned like a man's heels—dragged," he muttered to himself.

Returning to the point where the lines began, he started to examine the confused marks when his eye fell on one of the stone slabs which happened to lie there. At one end of it was a large dark patch. Dodd

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

peered at it closely, scratched it, examined his finger-nail, then licked his finger and, rubbing it in the patch examined it again. Then he rose slowly to his feet.

"Ever kill any pigs or chickens here, storeman?" he asked casually.

"No, sir, not so far as I know."

"What is it, Mr. Dodd?" asked Mildmay anxiously.

"Have you found something?"

"Looks like it," was the laconic reply.

The Superintendent continued to stare at the surface of the quay, as if trying to read the story scratched upon it. Then his eye fell upon another line which, starting from the river wall near the point where the two parallel lines reached it, ran diagonally across to a pile of heavy scrap iron which lay some yards from the end.

"Ah," he said. "That's why the body's not been found. Weighted and sunk!"

## CHAPTER V

### OPENING MOVES

"WEIGHTED and sunk? The—the body? You don't mean . . ." stammered poor little Mr. Mildmay, his face flushing and then going deathly white. The Superintendent took no notice of him, but with the help of a bar of iron prized up the flat stone on which lay the patch of congealed blood.

"Got something clean I can put around this?" he asked the storeman. "Good lad. Hop off and get it." The stone was soon wrapped up in a towel and tucked under the Superintendent's arm as easily as if it were a piece of wood. "Now, you there. No talk about this till I give the word. You, Mr. Mildmay, of course, you naturally wouldn't talk about it. Mr. Millet, you're sailing to-morrow and it's not asking you much to keep your mouth shut till you're at sea. And you, storeman—what's your name?"

"Copping, sir."

"Well, you, Copping; if I hear a word of talk about this I'll know it comes from you and you'll be for trouble. D'you take me, my lad?"

The storeman shrank back before Dodd's thrust out jaw, stammering vows of eternal silence.

"Of course," continued the Superintendent more mildly, "It's bound to get about that there's something up, because I shall have to drag this dock, but I don't want anything definite known before I find the body, especially about this blood. Now, Mr. Mildmay, we'll call on your night-watchman and then get back to headquarters. So long, Mr. Millet; so long, Cop-ping."

Mr. William Potts had no further information to give about the senior partner. He had seen him come in with Charles Morden at about half past eight and had seen him both on the deck of the *Snark* and on the quay beside her. But he quite definitely had not seen him leave and he was equally certain that he could not have left by the gate without his (Mr. Potts) seeing him—he (Mr. Potts) kept that gate locked and the key on his person and if anyone wanted to get in or out when he (Mr. Potts) was taking a turn up the quay, or was otherwise engaged, it could not be done until he (Mr. Potts) returned to the gate and unlocked it. He had not seen Mr. James in any of his promenades up the quay during the course of the night, nor any sign of anything unusual, and it passed his comprehension how he (Mr. James) had left that quay without him (Mr. Potts) seeing him, or how he (Mr. Potts) had come to forget that he had not seen him (Mr. James) go.

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About Charles Morden, Mr. Potts was perhaps less loquacious but more informative. He now remembered noticing that Mr. Charles looked very queer when he let him out. He had not answered when Mr. Potts said good-night to him and that was odd because Mr. Charles was a pleasant-spoken gentleman. He could not say what it was that Mr. Charles looked like, but he looked queer. He might perhaps have seen a ghost. There was no sign of his having been fighting but he looked different to what he had looked when he entered the dock an hour before.

With this information Dodd had to be content. Its value, however, was enhanced by the fact that Mildmay, before going to the police, had made enquiries at the office and had found that Potts had been in the service of the firm, either at sea or ashore, for some fifty years and bore an unblemished reputation. He was an odd character surely, but apparently absolutely reliable.

"I suppose we can take it, then, that James Morden either never left that dockyard or he left it in some unexpected way?" queried the Superintendent.

"It would seem so," replied Mr. Mildmay, pedantically.

"And that Charles Morden was very much upset about something when he left by himself at half past nine?"

"I fear as much."

A taxi bore the two men away from the dock

area in gloomy silence, each being engaged upon his own thoughts. Arrived at police-headquarters, Dodd showed his companion into a waiting-room.

"I'll just hand this stone over to the path. merchant," he said, "and then run in and report to the Chief. If you'll be good enough to wait here in case he wants to see you." And he was gone.

For twenty minutes Mildmay sat, with what patience he could, waiting for the next move in the drama that had suddenly enveloped his life. Just when he was beginning to think that he had been forgotten Dodd reappeared.

"Sorry to keep you," he said. "I don't think we need trouble you any more at present. You'll go back to your office, I suppose? Up to what time can I find you there?"

"Six-thirty is my usual hour," replied Mr. Mildmay. "But I can easily stay on, if . . ."

"No need, no need," interrupted Dodd. "Give me your home address, in case I want you after you've left."

Mr. Mildmay gave it.

"Right you are, then. So long for the present."

"But, Mr. Dodd, what are you going to do? What am I to tell Mrs. Morden? What am I . . .?" Mildmay called after the retreating figure of the big detective. Dodd put his head back into the room.

"Don't you fuss yourself. We'll see to all that. You trot back and keep the shop going."



"But the body—are you going to look for it? And Mr. Charles . . . ?"

"That's our job, Mr. Mildmay. Good-night to you."

With which illuminating reply Mr. Mildmay had to be content, for his informant had disappeared. The manager walked slowly back to the office and, calling his daughter into Charles Morden's room, gave her a full account of all that had happened.

In the meantime Superintendent Dodd was not idle. Detailing a subordinate to organize the arrangements for dragging the Morden dock, he took himself to the address in Werneth Street which Mildmay had given him as the lodging of Charles Morden.

From the fact that two or three ladies were grouped in the doorway it was clear to Superintendent Dodd that Mrs. Plummet was not wasting her lawful occasion. Disengaging the landlady from her impressed neighbours, the detective followed her into the house and gently closed the front door. It did not take him long to learn the little that Mrs. Plummet knew. Mr. Charles Morden had driven up to the house in his car, which he kept in a garage close by, at about ten o'clock the previous night. Mrs. Plummet had heard him run upstairs to his room and slam the door. There had followed a considerable commotion in the room itself, bumping about, opening and shutting of drawers, and similar noises; so much so that Mrs. Plummet had been constrained to mount to the landing outside Mr. Morden's room "in case," she explained, "her help might

be needed." Apparently it was not, for after a time the noises had ceased and Mrs. Plummet had descended to her own quarters again.

A little after eleven the landlady's attention (Mrs. Plummet was accustomed to retire late as the evening hours were the only ones she had free to devote to the study of literature) had been again attracted, this time by the smell of burning paper. This was unusual, as neither Mr. Morden nor her other gentleman on the second floor had had a fire since the middle of the month, and Mrs. Plummet had emerged from her sitting-room into the front hall in order to locate the phenomenon when Mr. Morden's door had opened and he had come downstairs carrying two suitcases or bags of some kind. On seeing Mrs. Plummet he had appeared put out, but had murmured something about being away for the night, back the next morning, had slammed the front door "rather irritably" it had seemed to his good landlady, jumped into his car and driven away.

After allowing a decent interval to elapse, in case Mr. Morden had forgotten something and returned, Mrs. Plummet had mounted to his room, just to see that everything was in order and his fire safe, and there had found the state of confusion that the office boy, Gurge, had previously described to Mr. Mildmay.

At this point Superintendent Dodd arrested the flow of Mrs. Plummet's waxing eloquence and announced that he would examine the state of the room for himself.

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"First floor, I think you said, madam? Which door?"

"On the right, his bedroom, sir. I'll show it you myself." Mrs. Plummet's eager foot was upon the first stair but the Superintendent restrained her.

"No need at all, madam, to trouble you. I can find my way there quite safely."

Something in the detective's voice must have persuaded Mrs. Plummet that he meant what he said, for, after opening her mouth to protest the willingness of her spirit to incur any trouble on his behalf, she left the words unspoken and remained obediently in the hall, but followed his mounting figure with a somewhat resentful eye.

Charles Morden's bedroom justified the description which had been given of it. Clothes lay about the room where they had been flung, drawers were pulled out, a cupboard door open. But it was to the grate that the detective first turned his attention; in it was a neatly-made coal "fire," with white paper around, all ready for lighting. Dodd stared at it, his face slowly turning to a brick red, his small eyes almost disappearing in the swelling flesh. An oath of the first water burst from him; then he turned on his heel and dashed out on to the landing.

"Hey, you Plummer, or whatever your silly name is!" he shouted. "What have you done to this grate? I thought you told me he'd burnt papers in it. If you've cleared them away I'll skin you alive."

The horrified landlady leant against the wall and gasped.

"I—I—haven't touched them, sir," she stammered.

"But the grate's clean—newly laid!"

"In the sitting-room, sir?"

"What sitting-room, blast you?"

"Mr. Morden's, sir—next to his bedroom—that's where the fire was."

"Why the hell didn't you say so then?" cried the exasperated but unreasonable detective, flinging open another door. This time the fire-place presented the appearance that he had been expecting. It was full of black charred paper. Striding across the room Dodd knelt down and very gently lifted out handful after handful of burnt paper. So thoroughly had the burning been done, however, that not the smallest uncharred piece remained, nor even a burnt piece sufficiently large and smooth to give any chance of reading what was written or printed on it. Indeed it seemed as if someone had stirred up the charred remains and broken them into something like powder.

A black scowl deepened on the detective's face. He rose to his feet.

"If that old fool's been nosing about in here, I'll . . ." he began, then checked himself, as if realizing that he had once already allowed his feelings to carry him too far and that there was no sense in antagonizing a useful witness.

He turned his attention instead to the large writing-

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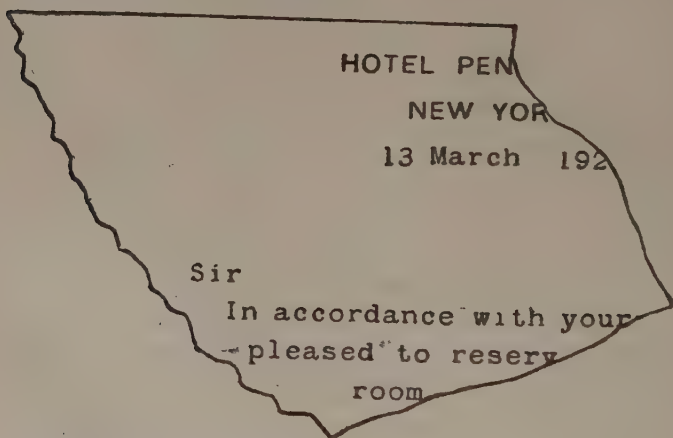
table, which bore much the same evidence of hasty treatment as did the chest of drawers and cupboard next door. Very carefully, but quickly, the Superintendent ran his eye over the contents of each drawer—all were unlocked—and of the trays on the table. One or two papers which had seemed important, together with a bank pass-book, he placed in his pocket, but nothing of immediate significance resulted from his search. A small safe in the corner of the room stood open and empty. Other cabinets, drawers, etc., would have to be searched at greater leisure, but a first survey suggested that everything of importance was, or had been, in the writing table.

With falling hopes Dodd returned to the bedroom and conducted another quick but thorough search, with equally disappointing results. In confirmation of the landlady's story of the two suitcases it looked as if just as many clothes had been taken as such accommodation would suggest. The fact that a razor-strop still hung on the curtain hook merely confirmed the previous strong indications that the packing had been done in a great hurry.

Gloomier than ever Superintendent Dodd returned to the sitting-room, staring first at the writing table and then at the now empty grate. He did not at all relish the idea of returning to his Chief with what was to all intents and purposes a completely blank report. Suddenly his eye was caught by a speck of white at the back of the grate. Kneeling down and lighting a

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match, he saw that it was caused by a piece of paper which had worked its way into a crack between two fire-bricks. Finding that one of these bricks was loose, he removed it and drew out a fair-sized piece of torn white paper, charred down on one side. Opened out, the paper disclosed this wording:



Superintendent Dodd rose to his feet with a sigh of relief. Here at last was something to go upon—definite line, in fact, to Charles Morden's probable destination. The date, too, might be of vital importance. Locking the two rooms and giving stern orders to Mrs. Plummet that on no account were they to be disturbed the detective returned to police-headquarters.

Sending for a list of sailings Dodd found that a Cunarder, the *Scythia*, was due to leave Liverpool for New York the following day, 2nd April, and the *Celtic*



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(White Star) on the 9th. Further afield the *Transylvania* (Anchor Line) would leave Glasgow on the 9th, but it was from Southampton that the largest choice of sailings could be made. The *Mauretania*, the *Arabic* and the *New York* were all due to sail the next day, 2nd April; the *Olympic* and a Holland-American boat, the *Volendam* on the 6th; the Norddeutscher Lloyd *Columbia* on the 9th, two United States Line boats on the 7th and 10th respectively, and the R.M.S.P. *Asturias* on the 16th. Two French boats would also be sailing for New York from Havre on the 6th and 13th respectively, but there was time to get the French police to attend to them.

Ringing a bell, he sent for Inspector Sheppard, a detective who usually worked under him.

"Here you are, Sheppard," he said when the latter arrived. "Take this list of sailings I've written out; send a man to Glasgow and go yourself to Southampton. You'll have to get the Southampton police—Borough, I expect, or it may be Hants County—to lend you some men for the double and treble sailings on the 2nd and 6th. Now, how are we going to get you there in time? Give me that Bradshaw."

The Superintendent pored over the time-table for several minutes, emitting grunts and groans, and jotting down various figures on a piece of paper.

"Look here, this is hopeless," he said. "Birmingham and Oxford seems to be the right way but the connexions at night are rotten. Look here, Liverpool 7.5 p.m.

—that's the first you could catch, and that won't give you any too much time. Gets you to Birmingham 9.45. But there's not a train on to Oxford till midnight and even then you have to wait at Oxford from 1.35 a.m. to 7.10 and that doesn't get you to Southampton till 10.31, which is almost sure to be too late—unless it's a very late sailing. The Reading connexion's no better."

"Could I do it by London, sir?" asked the Inspector. "It's very often quickest in the long run."

"That's an idea—let's have a look. Yes, you're right, this is better. Liverpool 10 p.m., Euston 5 a.m. Waterloo 5.40 a.m. (you can do that on your head in a taxi, but you must 'phone Euston to have one ready at that hour), Southampton terminus 8.48. Or you might go to Southampton West and take a taxi—that's the express and gets there at 7.52—yes, that would be much quicker. Now it just depends on what time the *Maur-etania* and the others sail. Get through to Cook's office on the 'phone and find that out—and ask them what time the gangways are open—you must get there before the first passenger goes on board."

"And I shall have to have time to go to the police headquarters and get some men to help me, sir. There are three boats and probably two gangways to each boat."

"Yes, that is a bit awkward—you must do the best you can. If you find out from Cook that the boats sail too early for that train you'll just have to fly. In

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that case get on to the Shotton aerodrome and ask them to have a 'plane ready for you. They'll probably kick at night-flying, but they'll have to take you. Now, you be off and get yourself ready. I'll get descriptions of this chap Morden run off and a photograph if possible. And I'll see the Chief about your instructions. Of course, we can't arrest as there's no body, but he can hardly refuse to come back and give evidence."

"Right, sir," said Inspector Sheppard. "I'll ring Cook, arrange about train or plane, get some dinner, and report again about eight. Will that do?"

Sheppard moved towards the door, but as he did so it was flung open and another plain-clothes man strode in.

"Come in, Vernon," said the Superintendent. "Don't bother to knock or anything like that."

Inspector Vernon flushed.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "I was a bit excited. I've just come from the Morden dock—we've been dragging it and the river outside it."

"Well, man, well, have you got it?"

"No, sir, we've not found the body, but we did some poling and struck a great bar of iron deep in the mud of the river just outside the dock. We pulled it up and found this tied on it."

He took his hand from his pocket and disclosed a large handkerchief that had once been white. In one corner were the initials J.C.M.

"James Morden's!" exclaimed the Superintendent.

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"I guess so, sir. It looks to me as if he'd bungled one of the knots and the drag of the tide pulled the body clear."

"By jove, it looks like it. Then the body must be floating now—down the Mersey and out to sea or stuck on a mud bank. You must hunt for it, Vernon, and don't come back till you've found it."

The Superintendent turned to Sheppard.

"This may make some difference to your instructions," he said. "We at least know now that the man's dead."

## CHAPTER VI

### A FAIRY STORY

IT was in unwonted silence that Helen Mildmay and her father made their way home that evening. The girl had heard of the discoveries that Superintendent Dodd had made on the quay of the Morden dock, and, though she knew nothing of the later developments, it did not need anyone of her intelligence to see the hideous implication against Charles Morden. The catastrophe had forced her to realize what Tom Fairbanks had so unexpectedly suggested—that she cared more than a little about her junior employer and his fortunes. Her father was nervous and fussy and she felt no inclination to confide in him, but it would be a great relief to talk over things with somebody really sympathetic. A girl friend might have met the case, but though she had many acquaintances of her own sex—she would, ordinarily, have referred to them as friends—her independence of character had prevented her from making any friendship which was quite intimate enough for this occasion.

It was with real pleasure, therefore, that she saw the

familiar figure of Tom Fairbanks standing disconsolately at the gate of "Rose Lawn." Tom was so dependable, such a really good sort, that she felt, now he was here, that he was the very person whom she wanted to talk to. It did not occur to her that her treatment of Tom on the previous night might have in any way alienated Tom's declared affection for her, nor did she think for a moment of the effect upon poor Tom's feelings of her obvious interest in a man whom he must now regard as a hated rival. Tom and his dependableness could now be a help to Helen Mildmay, and that was all she thought about.

Tom's anxious face lit up directly he heard Helen's cheerful shout of welcome. He had quite expected a frigid reception, but he had been equally unable to keep away from his adored one, at any rate until he knew just where he stood. It was with more than ordinary delight therefore, that he accepted an invitation to stay to supper and, still more, to go for a walk with Helen while it was preparing.

Away from parental restraint—or rather the restraint imposed by the parental presence—Helen at once unloaded her troubles.

"Look here, young Tom," she said, "you were pretty impertinent last night about Mr. Morden, but I've decided to forget about it. He looks like being in a pretty bad hole, and I think we ought to help him." And Helen poured forth an account of the day's happenings.

Tom listened with rapt attention. For once in a



way the Liverpool Press had been caught napping and there had been no mention of the Morden mystery in the evening papers, so that Helen's story was decidedly "news" to Tom. It did not, however, surprise him very much—at least, the disappearance of James Morden did not—he had, in fact, almost expected it. It was true that later events pointed to its being other than a voluntary disappearance, but even that was not yet definitely proved.

"It's an odd business," he said, when Helen had finished. "And Charles Morden's going off like that does look pretty queer. What do you suggest we ought to do?"

"Well, everybody'll be saying he killed that nasty James, and he's not here to defend himself, and I think we ought to try and help him. It's perfectly obvious he didn't kill him—he's—he's not that sort of man." Helen blushed prettily—she had by now almost persuaded herself that she was in love with Charles Morden. "Couldn't we find out why he really did go away? Or who really did kill James?"

"But would Charles Morden like us to poke our noses into his business?—Why he went away, I mean? It seems rather check," said the cautious Tom.

"Of course, it would be, ordinarily. But this isn't ordinary. He probably doesn't even know that James has disappeared, too. Anyhow, if we can find out who killed James that'll do just as well."

"It will," laughed Tom. "Let's do it to-morrow aft-

ernoon and have our life story in the Sunday papers! But, as a matter of fact, I don't think it's any cert that James has been killed. Any old pig may have bled on the quay and anything may have made those marks that the 'tec said were heel marks. It's odd the night-watchman didn't see him go, but he may have gone to sleep, or . . . look here!" cried Tom excitedly, "how do they know he isn't on the *Snark*?"

"On the *Snark*? Why, the crew would have seen him. And why should he be?"

"Because he wants to get out of the country! And how better than on one of his own boats? He could easily have slipped on board in the night—hidden in one of the sheds till the quay lights were out."

"But he'd have been found to-day when they were loading up."

"Not necessarily. Didn't you say the ship was sailing to-morrow—the hold must have been pretty well full up last night—he could easily have hidden. Or he may have arranged the whole thing with the skipper and simply be sitting in comfort in the stateroom!"

The audacity of the idea almost took Helen's breath away. "Tom, you're a genius!" she gasped, when she had recovered it. "I do believe you're right! But what on earth can we do? Go and search the ship ourselves?"

"Don't think they'd let us do that," said Tom, with a smile. "The only people who could very well do it would be Mr. Charles Morden, if he was here, or the

police. Unless your father did," he added, as an after-thought.

"Daddy? Yes, of course, he could! He's head of the firm now. Come on, Tom, let's fly back and take him straight down there!"

They flew back easily enough, but the second part of the program was of quite a different colour. Mr. Mildmay absolutely refused to go and search the *Snark* or even to go to police-headquarters and get them to do it. In fact, he threw cold water over the whole idea.

"It's preposterous," he said, as warmly as it was in his nature to speak. "Mr. James flying the country! A stowaway in his own ship! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Helen, thinking such a thing."

"No more than you ought to be, thinking that Mr. Charles murdered him!" retorted Helen hotly.

For almost the first time in his life Herbert Mildmay seemed to be really angry with his daughter. He absolutely forbade her to go to the police herself, as she threatened to do. This embargo simply had the effect of driving Helen there before, instead of after, having her supper. Tom followed her, murmuring apologetically to Mr. Mildmay.

When they reached police-headquarters they found Superintendent Dodd on the point of going out to his own supper, so that their welcome was not as warm as they might have wished. The detective could not, however, very well refuse to hear the daughter of the acting head of Morden and Morden. His reception of

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Tom's brain wave was hardly more enthusiastic than had been Mr. Mildmay's.

"Moonshine, young lady," he said chillingly. "You leave this job to the police—they can generally scrape along all right for themselves. And if you'll take my advice," he added, rising to indicate the end of the interview, "you won't set up an amateur enquiry agency of your own. That's all right in books, but in actual fact it's bunkum. Good evening to you."

The "amateurs," their youthful ardour momentarily damped by this official snub, turned to leave the room, but as they did so the door opened and Major Waring walked in.

He looked at the two young people and evidently liked what he saw, for he smiled pleasantly at them.

"Hullo; what have you two been up to?" he said. "Not got on the wrong side of Superintendent Dodd, I hope?"

"I'm afraid we have," said Helen, her courage quickly responding to the smile. "We thought we had an idea about Mr. James Morden's disappearance but Superintendent Dodd doesn't seem to think much of it."

The Chief Constable looked enquiringly at his subordinate.

"Some fairy story about Mr. Morden being a stow-away on the *Snark*," said the latter sourly.

"I rather like fairy stories," said Major Waring, "especially when they're told by fairies," and he smiled again at Helen. Tom began to dislike him, but Helen's

impression was entirely favourable. She launched once again into her theory, forgetting by this time that it was Tom's.

"But what makes you think that Mr. James Morden might want to leave the country?" asked the Chief Constable, after listening in silence. Helen looked at Tom, and the latter explained his suspicions about James Morden's financial position.

"Does your chief know you're telling me this?" asked Major Waring.

"No, sir. I haven't had a chance to ask him. It only occurred to me—about the *Snark*, I mean—this evening, and as there wasn't much time to be lost we thought we'd better come here at once."

The Chief Constable nodded.

"And Mr. Mildmay?" he asked.

"Oh, he wouldn't hear of it. In fact, he was quite angry at our suggesting such a thing and tried to stop us coming here," Helen confessed frankly.

"But did you tell him your ideas about Mr. James's affairs?"

"I don't think we got as far as that. We told him what we thought about his being on the *Snark* and he went straight in at the deep end."

"Well, don't forget, young man, that what you find out in the course of your job is absolutely confidential. You've got no business to talk to anybody about it, except, of course, to the police, and even so, you ought to have made an effort to get your chief's consent. You

should certainly not have told Miss Mildmay. Never mind, now," he added less severely as he saw Tom's crest-fallen appearance. "You've got sense enough to learn a lesson and it won't go any further than here. Tell your chief in the morning, though. Now be off. I don't suppose you've had your supper yet." He laughed as he pushed the two out of the room. Then he turned to the disgruntled Superintendent.

"There may be something in this, Dodd," he said. "Never turn your back on an idea, however wild, till you've had a good look at it. And those two aren't fools. Morden does live pretty high—what do you know about him?"

Rather unwillingly Superintendent Dodd admitted that he had some doubts about James Morden's financial stability. He had paid no attention to the story because a dead man was hardly likely to be a stowaway.

"No absolute proof that he's dead yet, Dodd," commented the Chief Constable. "You find his body and then we'll know he's dead—not before. What's Vernon doing—is he looking for it now?"

"No, sir, it's not much use looking to-night; there's no moon."

"Well, take him with you and go and rake over the *Snark*. It must be done quietly, but you must get hold of the skipper and take him with you. I must know for an absolute certainty that he's not on board. Had your supper?"

"No, sir."



"Well, there's no tearing hurry. She doesn't sail till to-morrow morning, I think you said. Send Vernon to find the skipper, get some food, and then join them down there. Let me know before ten." And the Chief Constable walked out of the room.

Their confidence restored by the friendliness of the Chief Constable, the two "amateurs," as Superintendent Dodd had contemptuously described them, discussed further plans for the defence of Charles Morden on their way back to "Rose Lawn."

"I know a fellow in the London and Liverpool—that's Morden's bank, if I remember rightly. Blidgeon, rather a conceited ass, but he may know something. Of course, he oughtn't to tell me anything, but I'll ask him to lunch with me to-morrow and if I tighten him up a bit he may let something out."

"Thomas, I'm surprised at you!" exclaimed Helen in mock horror. "And after you've just had your tail twisted on the subject of confidential information."

"Oh, well," said Tom, gravely, "I suppose we'd better do this thing thoroughly if we do it at all. We shall have to be a bit unscrupulous."

"Tom, there's hope for you yet." Helen patted him on the back. "I didn't think you'd got so much sense," she added, less kindly.

Mr. Mildmay had finished his supper when they got back, so they had the dining room to themselves and were able to continue the discussion. The atmosphere of the sitting-room, however, was too chilling even for

their young spirits and talk soon died away. At ten o'clock Mr. Mildmay rose.

"I shall retire now," he said coldly. "I have had a tiring day. Helen, I shall be glad if you will do the same."

"Oh, nonsense, father," began Helen. "It's much too early to go to bed . . ."

But Tom, with unusual wisdom, saw that Mr. Mildmay intended for once to have his own way. He decided to retreat in his own time.

"I'm a bit done up myself," he said. "I think I'll be getting along. Good-night, Mr. Mildmay; good-night, Helen. Thank you so much for my good supper."

For a moment Helen seemed inclined to rebel. Then realizing perhaps that the issue was not worth a battle, she shrugged her shoulders, ostentatiously chose a book, and mounted the tiny staircase to her room. Mr. Mildmay firmly locked the front door, slammed to the bolts, and followed his daughter upstairs.

. . . . .

At the same moment Superintendent Dodd was entering the Chief Constable's room at headquarters.

"Well, Dodd," said the Chief, looking up from the paper he was reading. "Any luck?"

"Nothing doing, sir. Keeling—that's the skipper—was as sick as muck and at first I thought he was going to refuse us leave. Made me a bit suspicious, he did. But when I threatened him with a search warrant he

caved in. We raked the ship right through—couldn't have missed him if he'd been there. At one time I thought we'd struck something. Keeling had shifted out of his own cabin and shoved the first mate out of his. The mates and the chief engineer were sorting themselves somehow. Keeling's own cabin—the one he'd left—was all swept and garnished, but there was nobody in it. He looked pretty foolish and talked some rot about its being too draughty for him. My belief is he's going to have a lady passenger."

The Superintendent winked knowingly. "Anyhow, Morden wasn't there, nor anywhere else on the ship, nor on the quay. Of course, he isn't, 'cause he's in the Mersey."

The Chief Constable laughed.

"So it was a fairy story after all, Dodd? Well, you find the body! All the same, we'll keep an eye on that boat," he muttered to himself.

## CHAPTER VII

### MONNA LISA

As the S.S. *Snark* moved down the Crosby Channel at the mouth of the Mersey on the morning of Saturday, 2nd April, she passed a small police launch nosing, even more slowly, along the sand-bank on the right-hand side of the river.

"Looking for the body, still, I suppose," said Mr. Millet, first officer of the *Snark*, to his commander. "Shouldn't think they'd do much good at high tide. Even at low tide I wouldn't bet much on their finding it—with all these mud-banks and cross currents there's no knowing where it mayn't have got to. May be half way across to Ireland by now. Funny things, tides."

Captain Keeling made no comment, but continued to stare straight ahead of him, drawing heavily at his long black cheroot.

Back in Liverpool, Superintendent Dodd was already at work. Overnight he had sent out an "information" to all police stations, giving a description of Charles Morden and of his car. Arrived at his office on Saturday morning, Dodd found that a telephone message had

been received from the Crewe police to say that a car with the registration number referred to had been noted entering Crewe at about 1 a.m. on the previous morning, coming from the direction of Liverpool. Nothing more had been heard of it, but it had not been seen to leave Crewe, though, of course, it was not being specially looked out for at that time.

"What's he doing in Crewe?" said Dodd to himself. "Useful place, of course. Junction for anywhere. Glasgow, Southampton, London. I must look into that."

He rang through to the Crewe headquarters and arranged for a thorough search of the garages to be made and all other possible enquiries. He also asked for a detective to be sent to the station to see if he could trace Charles Morden's departure by any train. A photograph and fuller description of the latter was to be sent by the next train.

Having done this, the Superintendent decided that it was time to make some further enquiries at the offices of Morden and Morden.

Mr. Mildmay received him deferentially and ushered him into Mr. Charles's room, where, he said, there was no fear of their being either overheard or interrupted. The detective thought that the manager looked even more harassed than on the previous day. There were lines under his eyes, and his hands seemed to shake as he cleared some papers off the desk.

"This affair's worrying you, I'm afraid, Mr. Mild-

may," he began, in a friendly voice. Dodd could always be friendly if there was anything to be gained by it.

"I am anxious, Mr. Dodd," replied the manager. "Very anxious. It's got on my nerves terribly; the idea of poor Mr. James lying at the bottom of the river, maybe half-buried in mud. Ugh!" Mr. Mildmay shuddered. "It's upsetting my daughter, too," he went on. "I can't say how sorry I am that she should have come and worried you last night with that mad idea of hers and young Fairbanks'. I tried my best to stop them, but you know what young people are nowadays."

"That's all right, Mr. Mildmay," replied the detective, heartily. "Don't you worry about that. That idea quite took the chief's fancy, you know, but, of course, there was nothing in it."

"Oh, there was nothing in it. So you did search the *Snark*?"

"Yes, we searched her all right. And what's more, we found something we weren't meant to!" Dodd paused dramatically, to watch the effect of this statement upon his hearer. Then he leant forward and tapped Mr. Mildmay on the knee. "Your Captain Keeling's taking a passenger with him this voyage!" He paused again, then added, with a laugh: "A lady passenger! Oh, yes, he is; you needn't stare. I've seen her myself. I guessed something of the kind and I had the ship watched last night and went down there



myself this morning. Nobody had gone on board during the night, my man told me, and nobody had left her, except Captain Keeling himself. And sure enough, at seven o'clock this morning along came Captain Keeling in a taxi with his lady passenger. Oh, no, it wasn't Mr. Morden; I saw her clear enough, and a very nice little bit of goods she was, too."

Superintendent Dodd laughed, as if the expression on his companion's face was a huge joke.

"Come, you mustn't be shocked!" he said. "Sailors will be sailors, and I don't suppose it's the first time. I wonder he left it till this morning, though. Bit risky taking her aboard in daylight when any of your people might have been about. Anyhow, that's that. Now, I want some more details about your two missing partners, please. Give me your description of their appearance, in the first place."

Mr. Mildmay, recovered from the effect of his companion's story of the skipper's scandalous conduct, complied to the best of his ability. Mr. James Morden was of normal height—say about five feet nine—dark-haired, clean-shaven, complexion rather high-coloured—noticeably so, in fact. He was inclined to be stout, and his age was forty-six. He had no particularly marked features or characteristics—physically speaking—nor did Mr. Mildmay know of any tattoo or birth marks. The hair was curly or, at any rate, wavy. Mr. Charles Morden was more easily described. He was of much the same height as his cousin, but had much more

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marked features. His nose had a noticeable hook, his eyes were a light blue, and he wore a short brown beard.

Having elicited these descriptions, Superintendent Dodd proceeded to investigate the financial affairs of the firm. These have already been outlined to the reader and need not be elaborated. The detective gathered the distinct impression that the firm was financially in a bad way; very little money could be finding its way into the pockets of the two partners by way of profit. About their private affairs Mr. Mildmay professed to have little or no knowledge, beyond the fact that Mr. James did himself pretty well and that Mr. Charles appeared to live very quietly.

"And how would you account for Mr. James being able to do himself well if there's no money coming in from the business? Has he money of his own, or has his wife?"

"No money of his own, so far as I know, Mr. Dodd. I fancy that Mrs. Morden has money. It's always a mystery to me how some people can live very high when they haven't got a big income. I fancy, though," added Mildmay, with a smile, "that Mr. James was a pretty good judge of a horse!"

"Oh, that was it, was it? Backed the winners, did he? Well, it's a useful habit, though I never knew many that had it. But perhaps you did a bit that way yourself, Mr. Mildmay?"

Mr. Mildmay hastened to deny the scandalous suggestion and did not seem to relish the Superintendent's

innuendoes on the subject. Dodd changed the subject.

"Can you suggest any reason why Mr. Charles Morden should have killed his cousin?" he asked abruptly.

The manager winced.

"You—you really think he did kill him?" he asked. "Surely it may be just a coincidence that he's gone away now? It seems so impossible that Mr. Charles could have done such a thing."

"Everything points to it. Let's assume it for a moment. Why should he do it?"

Mr. Mildmay looked gloomily out of the window.

"I can't think of any reason," he said at last. "Of course, they didn't see quite eye to eye about everything. They were different types. Mr. James took after his father and uncle—he was bold, enterprising—risky Mr. Charles thought him. Mr. Charles was all for caution—thought Mr. James was rather too speculative, and so on."

"Oh, they quarrelled about the management of the business, did they?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say 'quarrelled.'"

"But they had words at times?"

"Ye-es, I'm afraid there were words passed at times. But that wouldn't mean that Mr. Charles would kill Mr. James," Mildmay hastened to add.

"If Charles Morden thought his cousin was taking too many risks, he may have thought he was ruining the business? And if he was ruining the business, he

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would be better—from Charles's point of view—out of the way?" The detective leant forward and fixed Mr. Mildmay with his piercing eye. The latter fidgeted and looked very miserable.

"Don't press me, Mr. Dodd," he said at last in a low voice. "You can't think how dreadful the whole idea is to me. A most gentle, pleasant young man I've always thought Mr. Charles, and I just can't believe him guilty of such a thing."

Satisfied for the moment with the impression he had gathered, Superintendent Dodd released his victim.

"Well, I won't bother you any more now, Mr. Mildmay," he said. "Oh, by the way, what about cash? You don't keep any big sums here, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. Only on pay-days—Thursdays, that is. And then it's not a large amount."

"And the partners wouldn't have anything to do with that?"

"No. Oh, no."

"So if Charles Morden wanted money to get away with he wouldn't get it here?"

"No, certainly not."

"No, I didn't expect he would. Well, so long, Mr. Mildmay; see you later, I expect."

"Er—just one moment before you go," pleaded Mr. Mildmay nervously. "What do you think I ought to tell Mrs. Morden?"

"What, Mrs. James? Haven't you told her about him?"

"Er—not exactly. I rang her up last night and said that he'd been seen at the dock with Mr. Charles, but not since. But I didn't say anything about the blood or the—the other marks. I thought it better to wait for something more definite—in case you found the—the body. It seemed so needlessly cruel to give her such anxiety when there might be nothing at all in it."

"Oh, there's something in it all right," said the Superintendent coarsely. "There's the body in it—in the Mersey. Stop a minute—I'll go myself. I might be able to spring something out of her."

"Oh, but hadn't I better . . ." began the manager, but Dodd interrupted him:

"You stay where you are. I'll see about this."

He stumped out of the room and Mr. Mildmay watched him go with great misgivings.

Knowsley House was a very new and rather pretentious habitation, about two miles south of the village of Knowsley, at the south-west corner of Lord Derby's famous park. It had been built immediately after the War by a manufacturer whose services to the country during that profitable period had won him a knighthood and a fortune, and had been bought by James Morden in the 1920 boom when the aforesaid knight committed the solecism of backing the wrong animal on the Stock Exchange. Mrs. Morden liked to be in the country, she liked the proximity of the great, and there was always the possibility that somebody might mis-

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take the "House" on her notepaper for the neighbouring "Hall."

Superintendent Dodd stopped his taxi some distance away from Knowsley House. He wished to arrive as quietly as possible, so as to give Mrs. Morden the least time to arrange anything she might have to arrange, whether nerves or features or more material things. One never knew what unexpected revelations surprise might not spring out of the most unlikely people.

Mrs. Morden, however, received him at once and with complete equanimity.

"I was rather expecting someone from the police would come and see me," she said, with a smile, "though I thought it would probably be Major Waring. But I expect he's too busy to bother about our poor little troubles. You haven't heard anything of my husband or his cousin?"

It was evident to Superintendent Dodd that Mrs. Morden knew nothing of the tragedy that had occurred. This, then, was the moment to surprise her. He leaned forward, and in a low voice said impressively:

"I regret to have to inform you, madam, there are grave suspicions of Mr. Charles Morden having made away with your husband."

The brutal abruptness of the announcement was well calculated to expose the soul of the most controlled of mortals. Lilith Morden shrank back in her chair as if she had been struck. She quickly recovered, however, and sprang to her feet.



"What do you mean?" she cried. "Made away? My husband?"

"I'm afraid so, madam. Your husband and Mr. Charles Morden were seen together in the Morden dock-yard on Thursday night. There is strong evidence that Charles Morden struck your husband down and attempted to sink the body in the dock."

Lilith's hand went nervously to her mouth. She pressed her fingers against her lips. She stared at the detective with dilated eyes. She did not speak. Dodd tried again:

"Can you suggest why Charles Morden should have killed your husband?"

But if there had ever been a chance of getting anything out of Lilith Morden by surprise it was too late now. She answered calmly enough:

"I don't believe for a minute that such a thing has happened. What evidence have you?"

Reluctantly Superintendent Dodd was compelled to reveal the scantiness of his knowledge. Lilith listened carefully to his story and when he had finished said:

"I don't see anything in that. What's a little blood and a few scratches on the ground. It's monstrous to accuse a man of murder on such evidence. If my husband was killed, why haven't you found his body?"

"Well, whatever else she is, she's a damned plucky woman!" said the detective to himself. Aloud he answered: "We are looking for it now, madam. Of course, we have no absolute proof till we find it. But

I have no doubt at all myself—though, of course,” he added as an afterthought, “for your sake I hope I’m wrong.”

He paused for thought. Then said:

“In any case, madam, may I ask you a few questions?”

Lilith sat down.

“If you think it necessary,” she said.

Superintendent Dodd felt slightly deflated. His surprise attack had failed to achieve anything; he was conscious of having been rather brutal, and he had now been snubbed. Still, it was his duty to extract certain information and he did his best to extract it. He asked whether Mr. James Morden frequently absented himself from home and learnt that it was sometimes the custom of that gentleman to sleep at his club in Liverpool if kept late at work, or if he had an evening engagement in the city. He sometimes went to London for a night or two, though Mrs. Morden had never known him do this without informing her beforehand. The detective formed the opinion that while James Morden would have liked to kick over the traces a bit he was considerably under the control of his wife.

About Mr. Charles Morden there appeared very little to be said. Mrs. Morden evidently liked him in a lukewarm sort of way, but thought him quiet and dull—apparently the last person one would suspect of crime on the grand scale. So much so that Superintendent Dodd began to wonder whether this portrait was not being painted deliberately flat colours. His suspicions re-

vived. He felt inclined to question Mrs. Morden about her own and her husband's finances, but, being conscious of having rather exceeded his duty, he decided not to risk another snub that day. He rose to go, but as he reached the door a thought struck him, and he forgot his temporary anxiety.

"By the way, madam," he said, "just as a matter of form, would you mind telling me where you were yourself on Thursday night?"

Lilith's face set; he could not read her expression, but her words seemed to explain it.

"I was here," she said. "I dined alone and went to bed early. Is it your idea that I was helping to push my husband into the Mersey? Shall I call my maid to prove an alibi?"

The Superintendent wilted.

"No, no, madam," he assured, "quite unnecessary, of course. Just a matter of form." And he faded from the room.

As he closed the door he caught, in a mirror on the opposite wall, a glimpse of Lilith Morden's face. The expression puzzled him; he could not be sure whether it betokened sadness or whether it was a smile.

There is small wonder that the detective was bewildered. That look had puzzled thousands and millions of men and women since the master, Da Vinci, first committed it to canvas.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ATTACK AND DEFENCE

BACK at police-headquarters, Superintendent Dodd's drooping spirits were quickly revived by a message which he found awaiting him, to the effect that Charles Morden's car had been discovered in a garage on the outskirts of Crewe. Dodd gave a few hurried instructions about routine investigations that could be carried out by subordinates and caught the next train to the important L.M.S. junction town. In response to a telephone message a member of the Crewe force met him at the station and conducted him in a taxi to the garage which had reported the presence of Morden's car. As Dodd had anticipated, it was located on the Liverpool road. The proprietor reported that it had been brought in at about 1.45 a.m. on the Thursday night—or Friday morning, to be accurate. The gentleman driving it, who gave the name of Morden and answered to the description given by the Superintendent, had said that he might not be able to take the car out for some days, but that he would probably write about it. The gentleman had certainly seemed rather put out about something—he appeared nervy and irritable—but the pro-

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prietor had not noticed anything else particular about him.

"But why didn't he get here before 1.45?" muttered the Superintendent. "He left his digs soon after 11; it can't be more than 40 miles; I should have expected him here by 12.30 or 1 a.m. at the latest. Must have had a break-down. Well, let's see what train he could have caught."

Getting leave of the proprietor to use the small office attached to the garage, the detective produced from his pocket the Bradshaw that he had brought for the purpose and for a quarter of an hour was deep in its ramifications. At the end of that time he had worked out two alternative time-tables. In the first place, that which Charles Morden had probably aimed at, had he reached Crewe at 12.30 a.m. (which he should have done but for a break-down). In the second place, that which he could have used after 1.45 a.m., the time at which he actually reached the garage. The time-tables were as follows:

<i>C.M. arr. Crewe 12.30.</i>		<i>C.M. arr. Crewe 1.45.</i>	
<i>Crewe</i> . . . . .	12.45 a.m.	<i>Crewe</i> . . . . .	2.45 a.m.
<i>Birmingham</i> . . .	2.15 a.m.	<i>Birmingham</i> . . .	4.45 a.m.
	(change)		(change)
" . . .	7.30 a.m.	" . . .	as before
<i>Banbury</i> . . . . .	8.35 a.m.		"
	(change)		"
" . . .	8.45 a.m.		"
<i>Southampton (W.)</i>	1.25 p.m.		"

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<i>Crewe</i> .....	12.50 a.m.	<i>Crewe</i> .....	3.7 a.m.
<i>Glasgow</i> .....	6.45 a.m.	<i>Glasgow</i> .....	9.35 a.m.
<i>Crewe</i> .....	12.50 a.m.	<i>Crewe</i> .....	2.45 a.m.
			(Irish Mail)
<i>Euston</i> .....	5.0 a.m.	<i>Euston</i> .....	5.50 a.m.

The detective, in the light of his previous discoveries, took Southampton, Glasgow and London as Charles Morden's most probable objectives, though he realized that there were unlimited alternative possibilities. It was not impossible that he might be able to trace his departure from Crewe, though the local police had already tried the station without success.

Thanking the garage proprietor for his help, Dodd made his way to the Crewe police headquarters to discover just what steps had been taken to trace Charles Morden. It was no use going to the station at that hour, because the night staff would not be on duty. He was discussing matters with the Superintendent who had dealt with the enquiry when word was brought in that a Mr. Antonio Coccolini wished to see the officer in charge on a confidential matter.

"Can't see him now," said Superintendent Haddow. "Find out what it's about and tell him to come back after dinner—say half past two."

The constable retired, but returned almost at once, carrying a newspaper.

"He says it's urgent, sir. It's about the chap that's missing at Liverpool." The constable pointed to one

of the two photographs that appeared on the front page of the paper.

Dodd pricked up his ears and, snatching the paper without ceremony from the constable, found himself looking at two very badly reproduced photographs of James and Charles Morden.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's my man! Have this fellow in at once!"

The Liverpool police had had to proceed with great caution and tact in the matter of the disappearance of the two Mordens. There was as yet no definite proof that James was dead, and Dodd had not wished to make public his discoveries in the Morden dockyard. Still less was it proved that Charles Morden was a murderer, so that there was no question either of arresting him or of publishing his description as that of a man "wanted" for a crime which even yet might prove not to have been committed. By arrangement with the Press, however, a guarded version of the "disappearance" story had been issued for publication, together with photographs of the two partners, no mention being made of a suspected crime.

Mr. Coccolini was shown in. He proved to be an Italian, a small man in a dark suit, with a white scarf round his neck, a magnificent "quiff" of black hair and a fierce black moustache adding what was supposed to be grandeur to an otherwise insignificant appearance.

"Ze—ze chief of polis?" he enquired, looking from one to the other of the two plain-clothed superin-



tendents. He had evidently expected some magnificent individual covered in gold or silver lace.

"I'm Superintendent Haddow," said that officer, "and this is Superintendent Dodd, of the Liverpool police. You know something about Mr. Morden?"

The Italian pointed at the paper in Dodd's hand.

"Zis gentleman—'eem with ze beard. 'E call at my establishment—I am *coiffeur*, 'airdresser—yestairday morning. Airly—eight o'clock; I was only just open."

"How do you know it was Mr. Morden?" interrupted Superintendent Dodd. "This photo's pretty hazy in this damned rag—are you sure it was him?"

"Si, si, signor!" exclaimed the Italian excitedly. "I see 'is face close; I study eet. Ze beard, ze nose, ze eyes; they are ze same! I no meestake!"

"Well, what about him, then? What did he want? A hair-cut?"

"Ze beard, sair. 'E want eet off. I cut eet off. 'E 'ave now, what you call, ze naked cheen."

"Clean-shaven, by Jove!" exclaimed Dodd. "No wonder you couldn't trace him, Haddow! And my chaps at Southampton and Glasgow will be just as much at sea if I can't get on to them in time. Look here, you," he turned again to the little hairdresser, "what else did you do to him? What about his moustache? And his hair, did you cut that?"

"Ze moustache, I treem close. Eet is now, what you call, ze tooth-brush. Not ze Charlie Chapleen, ze leetle beets. No, ze toothbrush—vairy short, like ze officairs

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have. I know; I see zem when I work for Truefeet, at Aldairshot. Ze hair I treem, too, eet is short, smart—ze officair, too.”

The description was excellent. Dodd could see what an immense difference such a change would make in the missing man's appearance.

“Look here, Haddow,” he said. “I must get on to this at once. There's just a chance I can get through to Southampton in time. There are three boats leaving to-day, but they don't sail till three. Let's have your 'phone—Hullo, hullo, exchange! Look here, miss, this is Superintendent Dodd, Liverpool police, speaking. Can you get me through to Southampton police-headquarters as quickly as possible, please—it's an urgent criminal investigation matter. Thank you, miss. All damned nonsense,” he said, turning to his colleague, “we ought to be able to clear the line on an ‘urgent operations priority’ call, like they did in war, instead of having to beg it as a favour from a young squirt at the exchange.”

Dodd got his message through to Southampton all right, though he was uncertain whether it would get to the men watching the boats in time. Glasgow could wait, as the *Transylvania* was not due to sail till the 9th. He also rang through to his own headquarters in Liverpool, though he expected to be back himself in time to watch the sailing of the *Scythia* at 5 p.m.—not that he had the smallest expectation of the wanted man, well-known as he was, attempting to travel from that port.

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He arranged for Superintendent Haddow to carry out a second enquiry with the night staff of the railway station, concentrating particularly on the three trains which he had included in his experimental time-table. Having again questioned Signor Coccolini without eliciting any further information from him, Dodd took a brusque leave and set out upon his return journey.

Meanwhile in Liverpool forces were gathering for the defence. Helen and her father had quickly made up their difference of the previous night (the process consisted largely of an apology on the part of Mr. Mildmay generously accepted by his daughter) and on their way to the office that morning had talked over the steps to be taken for the protection of the two absent men. It was decided to adopt the fifth of the "alternative courses of action" which Helen had drawn up on the previous morning—to call in Mr. Turnbull, the family (and the firm's) solicitor. Accordingly, Mr. Mildmay's first action on reaching his room was to ring up Turnbull, Vent and Turnbull, and ask if Mr. William Turnbull would kindly step round to the office of Morden and Morden as soon after his arrival as it was convenient for him to do so.

At 11 a.m. Mr. William Turnbull appeared. He was an extremely good-looking young man of about thirty-five, tall and slim, with brown curly hair and a straight nose. Indecently good-looking, in fact, of the type that men sneer at and women—some women—adore. He was nominally the junior partner, but the first

"Turnbull" was dead, and old Mr. Vent now did little more than doze in the only comfortable room and talk family gossip with the most venerable clients. William Turnbull had always hated the idea of being a solicitor, having a passion for the army, but the years 1914-18 had more than satisfied his craving in that direction and he had returned to Liverpool willingly enough, and settled down into being a really sound, if not deeply knowledgable, lawyer.

"I'm glad you sent for me, Mildmay," he said, as he greeted the manager. "I've been wondering whether I shouldn't come round and see you, but I didn't quite like to shove my nose in without being asked. Of course, I know roughly what you want to see me about—I've seen what's in the papers and I've heard a good deal of talk at the club and elsewhere, but I expect there's a good deal more that hasn't come out. It's a dreadful business if it's half as bad as it's supposed to be."

"It is that, sir—a terrible business. If you will allow me, I will put it to you as we know it. Would you have any objection, sir, to my daughter being present? She is secretary to both the partners and has been in all this trouble from the beginning."

Turnbull had no objection; he had even less when the girl came into the room. He had seen her on two or three occasions, but only casually, and had not then noticed how extremely attractive she was. Methodically, Mildmay went through the story of "the trouble,"

as he called it, from the moment on the previous day when he began wondering at the absence of the two partners up to the present time. Helen prompted him from time to time and when he had finished, herself told the solicitor of the theory which she and Tom Fairbanks had formed, of their visit to police headquarters and of the mixed reception which the "fairy story" had there encountered. She did not, of course, know what the police had discovered—and Mr. Mildmay did not think it necessary to repeat the shocking revelations as to Captain Keeling's habits which Superintendent Dodd had reported to him—but the gossip of the office pointed the fact that a search had been made and that no sign of Mr. James Morden had been found.

"And who is Tom Fairbanks?" enquired Turnbull, when she had finished.

"Oh, he's just some sort of clerk to the Tax Collector," she replied carelessly. "We happen to have been talking about Mr. Morden on Thursday evening and so, I suppose, he worked this idea out when he heard of the disappearance."

"A very young lad, Mr. Turnbull," interposed the manager, testily, "quite irresponsible. I really can't think why my daughter should have listened to such tittle-tattle." A warning look in Helen's eye, however, reminded him of his recent apology and he went no farther.

"Well, Inspectors of Taxes often know things," said Turnbull, "and sometimes their clerks do, too—though

they don't usually talk about them. I'd like to see this young Fairbanks some time. Could you get hold of him?"

"If you wish it, sir."

"Well, never mind at the moment; now tell me, have you any idea at all why either Mr. James or Mr. Charles should have gone away suddenly without letting you know?"

"Absolutely none, sir. It's a complete mystery to me."

"You know of no trouble that either of them was in?"

The manager shook his head.

"Well, I confess I don't quite see what we can do at the moment; we've got so little to work on. We might advertise, of course, but we don't want to make more fuss than is necessary—there may yet be a natural explanation of the whole thing. I see the papers have got hold of something, though they're vague enough. I think the best thing will be for me to go round to police-headquarters and see the Chief Constable. He may be able to tell me something that we don't so far know."

Mildmay agreed with this suggestion and within ten minutes Turnbull was being shown into Major Waring's office. The two knew each other—they belonged to the same club—but not intimately, and under the present circumstances there was an atmosphere of guarded courtesy about their meeting. Each knew that the



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other was a potential antagonist and each wished to reserve his own forces while extracting the fullest possible information out of the other.

"You probably know why I'm here, Waring," Turnbull began. "I look after the Morden affairs and, in the absence of the two partners, Mildmay, the manager, called me in to advise him about the awkward position that appears to have risen. I know very little about it beyond the fact that both partners are away, possibly on their own affairs, but I understand that you people have been taking some action in connexion with them. Perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me what your position is?"

"I will," said the Chief Constable. "We didn't come into this on our own initiative. Mildmay himself came to consult me about his employers' absence and I put a man on to make enquiries."

Waring detailed the investigation made by Superintendent Dodd at the Morden dockyard, including the finding of the blood and the significant evidence of the night-watchman. "So you see we had no alternative but to take the matter up from our own point of view. We are looking now for the body of James Morden, which we expect to find in the river or on the shore at any time. At the same time we are enquiring into the absence of Charles Morden, who was the last person seen with James. So far we have not succeeded in tracing him, but there is an indication that he is making for New York."



"New York? Why should he go there?"

Waring shrugged his shoulders. "Why does anyone go anywhere? To get away from here, I suppose."

"But if—as you seem to suggest, though I can't for a moment accept it—if Charles Morden had killed his cousin, surely he wouldn't cross the Atlantic to get away from the police. What harder place could a man find to hide in than in a ship where he would be cooped up for days with a few hundred other people all known and docketed by the very fact of their having booked their passages? You'd be absolutely bound to catch him."

"Well, we haven't yet. I agree, I shouldn't do it myself, but criminals do funny things and there's apparently a strange fascination about the idea of getting away to America—especially to people who live at the end of the link, like we do. Of course, he may not have gone there, but that's our information at the moment."

"Yes, but look here, Waring; leaving that a moment. You talk very glibly about "criminals" and "getting away"—what real grounds have you for accusing Charles Morden? Come to that, what real grounds have you for saying that James is dead? You find a few scratches on the quay, where loads are continually being dragged about, and some blood that may just as likely be the blood of a pig or sheep!"

The Chief Constable shook his head.

"It might be, but it isn't," he said. "That blood's

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been analysed. It's human blood, beyond all question."

"Well, and if it is? Anybody else may have bled there—cut an artery or got a knock on the nose from the crane. You're not going to tell me that you can identify that blood as belonging to James Morden!"

"I can't tell you that," said Waring slowly, "but I can tell you something damn like it. I sent that blood-stain on the stone to our pathologist and asked him whether it was possible to distinguish human from animal blood, and further, whether it was possible to identify a human being from a specimen of blood such as this. Here's his report. It's pretty technical, but I think I can paraphrase it for you:

"In the first place, of course, it is quite simple to distinguish human from animal blood—I really knew that, but I asked as a matter of form, so as to get his written evidence. The other point is much more complicated. We needn't bother about classifications of blood for transfusion purposes—they don't help us here—but there are certain diseased states of the blood that can be recognized from the examination of such a stain as this."

"Do you mean from a splash of dried blood on a stone?" said Turnbull incredulously.

"So it seems. Most blood diseases require careful counting of the number of cells in a measured quantity of blood, but there are two types of disease that show alteration of character as well as of number and for

them this stain *is* sufficient—‘pernicious anæmia’ and ‘myelogenous leukæmia.’ In our case a lot of things called ‘myelocytes’ have been found in the films made from the blood—they are easily recognizable. Whoever’s blood this is had got that particular disease of the blood—myelogenous leukæmia—and in the early stages of the disease there may be an outward and visible sign of it in the patient himself—a high complexion. Now if you had to describe James Morden, Turnbull, what would you give as his most marked physical characteristic?”

“His complexion, I suppose,” said the lawyer reluctantly.

“Exactly. His complexion was extraordinary—‘high-coloured’ exactly describes it—damned high-coloured. He was as red as the proverbial turkey-cock. In other words, one can say that James Morden was a full-blown ‘museum specimen’ of the ‘myelogenous’ type. And I think you’ll agree with me that they aren’t so common that they shed their blood in the Morden dockyard every day—at the very spot and on the very night that this one is last seen?”

Turnbull shook his head gloomily.

“It looks damnably like it,” he said. “It’s stretching coincidence too far to doubt it. But look here, Waring, that’s one thing; accusing Charles Morden of killing him is another. He’s the last person in the world to do such a thing—a quiet, harmless fellow like that—why, he wouldn’t say ‘boo’ to a goose! He must have

gone to London or somewhere on some perfectly ordinary business—probably to have a tooth pulled out. This account that's got into the papers will bring him back at once, you may be sure."

"You forget," said the Chief Constable quietly, "that we have definite proof that he disappeared very suddenly, after destroying a lot of papers, and that we have strong grounds to believe that he's making for America."

"Oh, I don't believe it. Charles would be the last man to do a bolt like that."

"Oh, would he, sir? Then what do you make of that?"

While Turnbull was speaking there had been a knock at the door, and, in response to Major Waring's summons, Superintendent Dodd had entered the room in time to hear the lawyer's last words. His interruption was a breach of etiquette that could only be excused by the excitement of making a coup. The Chief Constable frowned, but glanced at the photograph which Dodd had slapped down on the table between them. It represented a young man with a hooked nose, light eyes, and a short tooth-brush moustache.

"Good God!" exclaimed Turnbull. "That's Charles Morden—without his beard!"

"Where on earth did you get that, Dodd?" said the Chief Constable.

The Superintendent swelled with pride.

"I didn't get it, sir. I made it—or rather I had Rait

and Birkett make it for me. This chap, Morden, had his beard shaved off in Crewe yesterday morning, and his moustache clipped. I got his description from the hairdresser that did it. Then took a photograph of Morden that I had got hold of—an old one, with the beard on, that is—round to Rait and Birkett—the photographers, you know, sir. They're a pretty clever lot and they faked up the old photo—blanked out the beard, shortened the moustache, built up a new face, in fact, on my description, and then took this new photo of the make-up. If that's not what Charles Morden's looking like now I'll eat it. And what's more," he added in a climax of triumph, "this photograph's now in the hands of the New York police, as well as ours, and they'll be waiting for him when he lands!"

"In New York—already!" exclaimed Turnbull. "But how on earth did you get it there; by aeroplane?"

"No, sir. By telegraphic photography!"

## CHAPTER IX

### SCOOP FOR THE "ARGUS"

THE pumping of Mr. Hector Blidgeon, junior clerk in the London and Liverpool Bank, followed very much the course which Tom Fairbanks had foretold. Mr. Blidgeon, invited to lunch with Tom at Welsh's, had proved at first condescending and uninforming. He had, of course, a great deal of inside information as to the Morden affair, but such knowledge was confidential and could only be divulged at the proper time and to the recognized authority. As the lunch proceeded and Tom saw two perfectly good Besses disappear without any apparent effect upon the tongue of Hector, he had some moments of anxiety—no qualm of conscience nor of any deeper emotion, since he had confined himself to the lightest lager, but simply anxiety lest his ten shillings were going to be wasted—but an eleventh-hour (and shilling) brain-wave in the form of a large glass of Cockburn's "fruity" did the trick. Leaning forward and tapping his host confidentially on the arm, the now blissful Hector announced to his old bean that he could tell him a funny story about that chap James—James—James Morden.

Stifling his eagerness, Tom lent an accommodating ear to the confidence. It appeared that old Jimmy (as he had now become) had come into the bank one day in a great hurry and had shoved a cheque to self across the counter to be cashed. When the cashier looked at it he saw at once that it was not one of their cheques, but one of the West of Scotland Bank. He pointed this out to Mr. Morden, and old Jimmy had got into an awful stew—snatched it back and buzzed out of the old shop without his cash. Nobody would have thought anything about it if he hadn't got so rattled, but the clerk had noticed that it was the Manchester branch of the West of Scotland Bank and he (Mr. Blidgeon) wouldn't mind betting that there was a jolly little dolly settled somewhere in that gay city.

Tom nearly shouted with excitement. Here was the very thing that he himself had suspected—James Morden had two banking accounts! Hardly able to restrain his eagerness or to conceal his impatience to be rid of the now empty orange, Tom listened with the barest attention to the confidences of an intimate character which the last great thought had summoned from the vasty deep of Mr. Blidgeon's mind. At last the rosy tint inspired by Cockburn began to fade and Tom was able to release himself from a now somnolescent guest.

Tom's first impulse was to look up the next train to Manchester, but a realization of the day brought him back to earth. Not only was the bank closed for the



day, but Sunday also would have to pass before he could prosecute the enquiries that were forming in his mind. The alternative course was to go and tell Helen about the success of his nefarious trick, and this he did, with great pleasure to himself, even if with no profit to his cause. Saturday afternoon and evening passed only too quickly, but Sunday proved unexpectedly tedious. For some reason Miss Mildmay found it necessary to escort her father to chapel in the morning, and when Tom arrived at "Rose Lawn" at the earliest hour countenanced by Liverpool etiquette for an afternoon call he found Helen admitting a group of ladies, accompanied by unwilling husbands, with "tea" written largely all over their expectant faces. Tom turned forlornly away and plunged listlessly into such dissipation as his Junior Conservative Club could afford.

Monday morning found him early at his office, polishing off the most urgent business before the great Inspector should arrive. Tom had a tricky application to make and, as the hour approached, his courage, if not his determination, began to ooze out of his toes. He had a far more delicate and even dangerous task before him if his application succeeded, but sufficient unto the moment was the risk thereof.

As it turned out, Tom need have had no qualms. The Inspector had, unjustifiably it is to be feared, complete faith in Tom's trustworthiness and he granted without question the latter's request for leave off for

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the morning to go to Manchester on urgent private business.

With a slight twinge of conscience, all too quickly fading before the glow of successful intrigue. Tom made with all decent haste for Lime Street Station, and caught the eleven o'clock express to Manchester. He had already assured himself that there was only one branch of the West of Scotland Bank in that city and a few minutes before noon he was inside its unlovely walls. It has already been said that Tom's mission was both difficult and dangerous, and even the latter word—applied not to his life but to his career—will hardly appear too strong when one considers that his only chance of success lay in a colossal bluff, not bluff in his own name but in that of his chief, and bluff directed against a Scotsman! Tom Fairbanks was, in fact, doing a madly stupid thing, to look at it from the most lenient point of view. With a hundred to one chance of success, he was risking an excellent position, and a still more valuable "character" for the sole purpose of justifying a boast made to his lady-love. For what did he care about Charles Morden, except in so far as his fate affected Helen? Romance, encouraged by the Silent Drama, what crimes, what follies . . . ?

Anyhow it was frightfully exciting, thought Tom, as he marched up to the most important-looking bank messenger and presented the card of the Inspector of Taxes, Liverpool. Tom was dressed in his most sombre, and least shiny, suit; a pair of plain glasses, used on

some theatrical occasion, lent sobriety to his too cheerful face, but even so the messenger raised his eyebrows as he read the card.

"Ask the manager to be good enough to see me for a few minutes on a confidential matter," the bogus Inspector said in his most businesslike voice. Tom had turned over in his mind the alternatives of asking for the manager or for some less prominent official and had decided that, while the latter might be easier to gull, to ask for anyone less than manager on such an important matter might arouse suspicion. If he was going to bluff he might as well bluff up to the neck.

Within a minute Tom was ushered into an inner room, lit only by an electric reading lamp on the writing table. As he seated himself in response to the manager's greeting, Tom might, had he been more experienced, have noticed that the light fell upon him and not upon his companion. As it was, he was only aware of a rather dim figure regarding him with a steady but quite unhostile gaze.

"I called," began Tom, hoping that the tremor of mingled nervousness and excitement in his voice was not noticeable; "to ask you for some confidential information about one of your clients. I am aware that such a request is unusual, but in view of the circumstances, of which doubtless you are aware, it is essential that the Inland Revenue Authorities should obtain certain particulars which hitherto have been concealed from them by the person concerned—I refer to Mr.

James Morden, senior partner of Morden and Morden, ship-owners, Liverpool."

Tom paused to read the effect of these impressive words. Not a flicker passed over the impassive face before him. Slightly disappointed, but in a sense reassured, Tom continued:

"I have reason to believe that Mr. Morden's 'returns' were not strictly in accordance with the facts of his financial position. In view of his disappearance and of the grave suspicions which surround it—I refer to the possibility of his having absconded—it is essential that I should obtain the necessary information with the least possible delay. I have already dealt with the Liverpool Bank in which, as doubtless you are aware, Mr. Morden held an account; I have now to ask you to be good enough to give me similar information regarding his account with you."

Amazed at his own glibness, Tom gathered confidence as he proceeded, especially as no murmur of doubt, or even of denial, came from the bank manager. Now, however, something more than acquiescent silence was required from the latter. Tom paused and looked at him interrogatively; after a short interval, which was just beginning to make Tom feel uncomfortable, the manager spoke, the softest burr alone hinting at his nationality.

"And the Liverpool Bank was able to accede to your request?"

This was an unfortunate question; Tom had hoped

by implication to avoid a direct lie, but there was no help for it.

"That is so," he said, keeping the lie as short as possible.

"And what is the exact nature of the information you require?"

"Well, the simplest thing would be to let me have a look at his books," said Tom, lapsing in his eagerness from the more formal speech of his adopted rôle. The manager again remained silent for a while.

"I fear," he said at last, "that I should not be able to agree to that without reference to my head office. The matter is an unusual one."

Tom's face fell, quite visibly if the poor boy had only known it.

"That—that's rather awkward," he said haltingly; then, more firmly, "there will, I trust, be no unnecessary delay? I repeat that the matter, from the Inland Revenue point of view, quite apart from any other, is urgent."

"If you will be good enough to call in to-morrow morning at about the same time I shall be in a position to tell you the decision of my directors."

Realizing that this was all he was going to get that morning, Tom took his leave with as much *empressement* as possible. He wondered whether his nerve would carry him through a second ordeal, but at least he had not been eaten, at least his bluff had not yet been called. There was still a chance that he might amaz-

ingly succeed, and then—then what would Helen think of him—Helen who had laughed at his claim of "daring"? With mingled feelings of disappointment, relief, suspense and hope, Tom made for the station and caught the one o'clock train back to Liverpool. Had he noticed the bank clerk who followed him at a respectful distance he need have felt no suspense, no hope.

Although eager to report his adventure to Helen, Tom thought it wiser to return straight to his own office. It is to be feared that his work that afternoon, routine as it was, did not receive his undivided attention, but he got through it somehow and soon after five he waylaid Helen, as he had so often done before, at the corner of Lord Street and Whitechapel.

"Come to the Nook and have some tea," he said eagerly. "I've got a frightful lot to tell you."

Helen had not intended to do anything of the kind, thinking that master Tom had been a bit too inclined lately to inflict his company upon her, but his manner now so clearly indicated that he was engaged with something other than the state of his affections that she consented. Finding a secluded corner in the quiet basement tea-shop that he had previously "discovered," Tom poured into the attentive ears of Helen a full, and only slightly varnished, account of his morning's adventure. The look of growing admiration on the girl's expressive face was more than ample reward, Tom felt, for all the pains and penalties, if any, that might be before him.



"Well!" exclaimed Helen, when he had finished, "you've got a nerve, my lad! I didn't think you'd got the guts to do it." This was praise, indeed. "Do you really think you got away with it? Will they show you the books to-morrow?"

"I think I did. He didn't show the slightest sign of suspecting I wasn't old Marks. I don't know whether the directors'll let me see the books, of course, but I hope so. That bit about the London and Liverpool having let me was rather a brain-wave, though I had to tell rather a downright banger about it—that may impress them."

"Tom, you really are a bit of genius. Fancy your sitting there and pretending you were the Almighty Tax Collector or whatever his title is! You ought to go on the stage or join the police or something. What do you expect to find if you do see the books?"

"Well, I don't quite know, but I shall have a look at the principal debit and credit items—see who's been paying in money to him, particularly—though I shouldn't wonder if a lot of it isn't cash transaction."

"Why?"

"Well, fishy things are generally done in cash—it's safer than putting your name on a cheque."

"But if it's fishy, why should he have kept it in his own name? Why didn't he open an account, or whatever you call it, in a false name?"

"Well, that's a different matter. You see, banks are pretty inquisitive; before they open an account they



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want to know something about you—you have to give references, and that sort of thing; I believe, though I daresay if you paid in a good fat sum in cash they wouldn't be too particular—some of them, anyhow. Still, all that sort of thing would be more difficult under an assumed name. Even when they've got you, banks nose about into your affairs pretty closely—they want to know what you're good for and how far it's safe to let you overdraw. Of course, they keep what they find to themselves—that's what makes our job—the Income Tax people's, I mean—so jolly difficult."

"But how'll it help if you do see all that?"

"I don't know yet; it all depends on what I find. If I can find out where the money's been coming from we may be able to find out what his game is and where he's gone to. And if there's a big sum in cash just been taken out it'll be pretty conclusive proof that he's done a bunk!"

"Tom, do you really think he has? How do you get round that blood and all the rest of it? The police seem to be absolutely certain he's dead."

"Well, I believe it's all a fake. I believe he did it to cover up his tracks in the hope that people would think he was dead and not try to follow him up. (It was Tom's secret belief that Charles Morden was somehow implicated in the imagined conspiracy, but he had learnt sufficient wisdom to refrain from saying so.) If he's dead, why don't they find his body? Because there isn't any body to find!"

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But Tom was wrong. As he walked to the office the next morning, turning over in his mind the exact extent to which his bearding of the bank manager had advanced his cause in the eyes of Helen, he met a sudden rush of paper boys calling an extraordinary edition of the *Evening Argus*. Raucous cries and flaring placards declared the exciting news: "Extra Speshul!" "Orful sensaition!" "Ghastly detiles!" and in more sober print: "Morden Case. Sensational Development! Body Found!"

Bewildered, Tom bought a copy and read in the half-empty column in the centre of the front page, from which some unimportant item of racing news had evidently been lifted to make room for it:

"The *Evening Argus* learns that a police launch, searching the channels and mud-banks of the mouth of the Mersey at an early hour this morning, came upon the body of a man lying on the high-water mark of Formby Bank. The face was greatly disfigured by long immersion and also, apparently by blows of some kind, but there appears to be no doubt that the body is that of Mr. James Morden, senior partner of Morden and Morden, who disappeared last week. A representative of the *Evening Argus* was quickly on the spot and a second edition with further details will be issued shortly. Special to the *Evening Argus*."

The *Argus* had secured a scoop!

## CHAPTER X

### FLOTSAM

THE *Argus* was right. Inspector Vernon in his police launch, nosing about among the mud-banks at the mouth of the Mersey in what had become little more than a routine search, had suddenly come upon the body lying high and dry upon the sand of Formby Bank. Landing some distance away, so as not to disturb the ground round the body, Vernon had satisfied himself by a glance that this was indeed the object of his prolonged search and, telling his men in the launch to see that no one else approached it, had gone straight to the post office in Hightown village and telephoned to headquarters. Half an hour later he was joined by Superintendent Dodd, who had come out by car, and as the two officers walked down to the shore, Vernon briefly described the circumstances of his discovery. When they were still some fifty yards away from the body, Dodd halted.

"What about footprints?" he said. "Have you and your chaps tramped all round it?"

"No, sir, certainly not," replied Inspector Vernon

in an injured tone. "I went straight from the launch—where you see it now—to within ten yards of the body—no closer. I went straight back to the launch, told my fellows to keep anyone else away, and then straight up to the village. Here are my tracks going up—we've come straight back along them."

"See any others?"

"None, sir."

"Well, search the beach two or three hundred yards on each side. Don't come too near the body—I'll see to that. Look out for foot marks or boat marks."

"But, sir, the body was washed here—there wouldn't be . . ."

"Do what I tell you," growled the Superintendent.

Vernon went off, with lips tightly closed to prevent the sally desired by his tongue, and Dodd carefully approached the body. The beach was sandy and his feet sank in as he got nearer the water, leaving clearly-defined marks. None other was visible from where he stood—it was clear that only from the sea could the body have got where it was. It lay face downwards, the head in the line of flotsam left by the receding tide, the feet pointing to the sea, and the arms slightly outstretched. The merest glance was sufficient to show that it had long been immersed in water—the clothes were sodden and colourless, as only long immersion will make them, the shoes showed signs of imminent disintegration.

Having satisfied himself that there were no marks

round the body that might need examination, the detective knelt down beside it to get a closer view and at once became conscious of an unusual look about the back of the head. There was no blood—the sea would have removed that—but the shape seemed wrong, and a touch of the fingers confirmed the impression of injury. Carefully turning the body over, even the hardened detective could hardly restrain a gasp of horror at the ghastly appearance of the face. The mud and sand adhering to it were unpleasant in themselves, the green and bloated appearance of the flesh was horrible, but worst of all were the dreadful injuries to the features themselves. The nose was crushed, one eye had been knocked in, and the jaw was hanging limp. Only the most violent and cruel blows could have inflicted such injuries.

The Superintendent sat back on his heels and gazed in silence at the tragic wreck before him. Minutes passed and he made no move, though a frown deepened on his face. At last he shrugged his shoulders and set about the methodical execution of his search. The condition of the body, apart from the face, was only as he had expected to find it—the swollen abdomen, the stained chest, the swollen and bleached hands, the softened and colourless eye, were only too familiar to a man accustomed to deal with the tragedies of a great sea port. It was to the contents of the pockets that he turned with the greatest interest. In the breast pocket of the jacket was a pocket-book, containing a

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fair amount of money in treasury notes. There were also other papers—letters or something of the kind, but these were so sodden as to be undecipherable. In the trouser pockets were a bunch of keys and some small change, and there were also, in various pockets, a pen-knife, a gold pencil, a sodden bus ticket, and a cigarette-holder. It was evident that there had been no robbery.

Dodd did not attempt to make a detailed examination of his find now, but turned his attention to the clothes themselves. Evidently the suit had once been a good one of some dark material, though it was now a sodden grey; the bow tie was still in position round the pulped collar. But it was when he turned to the feet that the detective made his most interesting discovery—round the right ankle was tied a wisp of material that appeared to have been a coloured silk handkerchief.

"That settles it," muttered the Superintendent, "he evidently knotted the two handkerchiefs together so as to get enough length to go round both the ankle and the iron bar—and the knot slipped. The odds are that we shall be able to identify this as Charles Morden's, and then we've got him—and that knot'll slip in a different way," he added with a chuckle.

There being nothing more to be learnt on the spot, the body was carried to the launch, laid on the bottom and covered with a tarpaulin. Dodd himself returned to Liverpool by car, after learning from Vernon that there were no footprints on the sandy beach within a quarter of a mile on either side of the body. At the

time that the launch left with its gruesome cargo there was still no *Evening Argus* representative on the spot so that that paper had evidently drawn to a certain extent upon its imagination; how it had got the news at all at the early hour it did was a mystery that could, probably, only be explained by some bright unit of the telephone exchange.

Having reported his discovery to the Chief Constable, Superintendent Dodd decided to make one more attempt to surprise something out of Mrs. James Morden. He, therefore, took another taxi and presented himself at the door of Knowsley House. It was still fairly early and she appeared, carrying a morning paper—the *Evening Argus* had not yet penetrated to Knowsley. Mrs. Morden had steadily refused to accept the assumption of her husband's death and she wore no mourning. Her smile was sad but friendly, and Superintendent Dodd felt slightly less pleased with his opportunity. However, duty was duty; he pulled his face into as solemn a shape as possible.

"I have to inform you, madam, that the body of the late Mr. James Morden has been found."

Lilith was in the act of lighting a cigarette. As he spoke he saw her become suddenly motionless; the hand that was raising the match to her cigarette paused midway; the match itself burnt up and reached the fingers, which automatically dropped it, the woman herself being apparently unconscious of the pain. Lilith slowly turned a dead white face to her visitor.



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"His body? Found?" she whispered.

"Yes, madam, at the mouth of the river, very nearly where we expected to find it. It had evidently been in the water some days."

"But—but—it can't . . ." her voice trailed away. She sank into a chair and stared blankly in front of her.

The silence became painful and Dodd had to restrain himself from fidgeting. At last she turned to him and the detective could not help admiring the control that she had regained over herself.

"Are you absolutely sure?" she asked quietly.

"I'm afraid so, madam, but, of course, there must be formal identification. I was going to ask whether you felt prepared . . ."

Lilith went through her terrible task with the quiet courage that Dodd had come to expect of her. She seemed curiously dazed, as if she felt the whole thing to be a nightmare rather than grim reality. Evidently she had been utterly unconvinced by the suspicions of the police, so that their confirmation came as a staggering blow to her.

Turnbull and Mildmay had also been present at the identification. The latter was terribly overcome by the sight of his dead—his terribly dead—employer; he could hardly be brought to enter the mortuary and was so unnerved by the sight that his identification was of little value. Turnbull frankly confessed that he could not possibly say whether the bloated face and figure be-

fore him were those of James Morden, but Lilith had no doubts. Whether it was merely the instinct of the mate or some mark or shape or the general appearance that she recognized she did not say, but she unhesitatingly confirmed the evidence of the clothes and belongings.

When Turnbull had taken Mrs. Morden back to her home and a very shaken little manager had returned to his difficult and responsible work at the dead man's office, Superintendent Dodd took himself and the coloured handkerchief round to Charles Morden's lodgings. Mrs. Plummet could not help him, but sent him round to the laundry, the manageress of which at once identified the red cotton heiroglyphics sewn into one corner as the trade-mark allotted to Mr. Charles Morden.

Thrilled by this confirmation of his theory, Dodd returned to headquarters and was soon closeted with the Chief Constable.

"That's evidence enough, sir, I think," he said. "Now we've only got to catch the chap and he's as good as hanged."

"Motive, Dodd?"

"Business jealousy, sir. He thought his partner was ruining the business—Mildmay told me about it—they were always squabbling—so he put him out of the way."

"But why bolt? That won't do his business much good."

"Oh, I don't know, sir; he may think it'll blow over. Or he may have lost his nerve."

The Chief Constable sighed.

"It's a damnable business," he said. "A decent chap like Charles Morden doing a thing like this! I can hardly believe it. And yet I admit that it's about as black against him as it could be. We'll have to get a warrant and notify all police forces—American and French as well—to detain him, for extradition if he goes abroad."

"Yes, sir. And what about those sailors—Captain Keeling of the *Snark* and his mate? They are important witnesses. They saw the Mordens together on the quay. Shall we fetch them back?"

The Chief Constable thought for a while.

"One doesn't want to do that if it can be avoided," he said. "It would be a serious matter for the firm—probably mean bringing the ship back—she could hardly go on without her two first officers. It's not just the navigating but all the commercial side of their work." He paused again. "You've got their depositions, haven't you?"

The detective nodded, and the Chief went on: "Look here, just find out from Mildmay when he expects them back and what their movements are—how much it would upset his apple-cart to bring them back. Then we can radio them that they may have to come back—that'll give them a chance to fix things. We won't have them back until we've got Morden."

The Superintendent himself had no qualms about interfering with trade, but he was not prepared to argue the point with his superior.

"When you've seen about the warrant," continued the latter, "you'd better get hold of James Morden's will—there may be something in that. And you'd better look up Charles Morden's banking account—if they'll let you. Difficult people, these bankers."

Superintendent Dodd, whatever his faults; was not a man who let the grass grow under his feet. It was no good going in search of Morden's will, because he knew that the latter's solicitor was at present engaged in looking after Morden's widow. He therefore turned his attention to Charles Morden's bank. After the usual preliminary fencing with the manager, in which a discreet mixture of tact and authority overcame the inevitable routine objections, the detective emerged with a pretty clear confirmation of his anticipations. Charles Morden, by the quiet accumulation of modest earnings and profits, had since the War collected the useful little fortune of between twelve and thirteen thousand pounds. During the last month he had evidently been selling his securities and accumulating the proceeds on deposit. On the 29th March he had drawn practically the whole of this out and it was significant that the bulk of it he had taken out in dollar notes.

"No doubt about the premeditation," he muttered to himself. "About as deliberate, cold-blooded a business as ever I was in. May make my 'motive' a bit thin

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with the jury, though," he added as an after-thought. "I shall have to work that up."

By the time Dodd had done with the bank, the dead man's solicitor was back at his office. Turnbull made no difficulty about showing him the will, nor was the latter much the wiser when he had seen it. Apart from a few legacies to members of his staff, James Morden had left the whole of what he died possessed to his wife, Lilith Rosemary Morden.

"And what does that amount to, Mr. Turnbull," enquired the detective.

"I've really no idea," replied the solicitor. "Mr. Morden didn't take me into his confidence about his financial affairs. I shall have to look into his bank account. I'm a co-executor with Mrs. Morden, as you may have noticed."

"Still, I suppose he was a rich man? Big house, lots of servants, cars, greyhounds, all the rest of it."

Turnbull shrugged his shoulders.

"Appearances are sometimes deceptive," he said.

The platitude appeared to satisfy Superintendent Dodd, who took himself off in the direction of Morden and Morden, chuckling at the prospect of a little fun.

He found Mildmay, now more or less permanently installed in Charles Morden's room, still looking white and shaky after his recent ordeal.

"Come, Mr. Mildmay," said the Superintendent, slapping him on the shoulder with ponderous amiability, "you mustn't let yourself get upset by a little business

like that. That's all in the day's work, you know; what should we become if we were turned up by every sea-green stiff we had to handle?"

This little pleasantry seemed to appeal to its originator who chuckled deeply, though his companion appeared unable to recognize the humour of it. The Superintendent now came to business.

"Are you aware of the contents of the late Mr. James Morden's will?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Mildmay. "Certainly not; how should I be?"

"Oh, well, I just thought you might have heard something about it," said Dodd, airily. "It's important from our point of view, you know, because we naturally look with suspicion on anyone who benefits by the death of a murdered man."

"I see. Yes. I suppose so."

"We should like to know, for instance, what each beneficiary was doing on the night of the murder—alibi, you know."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," repeated Mr. Mildmay, who seemed rather at a loss.

The detective suddenly leant forward and stared in what he considered a penetrating manner at his victim. He spoke slowly and impressively.

"You, Mr. Mildmay, benefit to the extent of five hundred pounds by the death of your employer; where were you on the night he was murdered?"

## CHAPTER XI

### NORDDEUTSCHER LLOYD

MR. MILD MAY took some little time to recover from the shock of the Superintendent's joke—for so in great part it proved to be. He was able to give a satisfactory account of himself, as it happened, because he had been playing whist with some friends until a late hour on the night of the 31st March and had, moreover, further evidence as to his presence at home throughout the night as he had eaten something that disagreed with him and had been obliged to disturb his daughter two or three times in order to obtain some trifling nursing attentions from her.

"Well, well, we'll look into all that," said Dodd, turning his attention to what were, to him, more important matters. "About this money now—that was found on the body. I want to trace that if I can. I think you told me that the partners would not have anything to do with any cash that you had here?"

"No, they would not; except that once in a way one of them—Mr. James most often—would cash a cheque here if he was in a hurry. But that has not been done lately."



"And if they had, would you have kept a note of the numbers on the notes?"

"Oh, no, not treasury notes—we don't do that—not even banks do, you know."

"No, I suppose not. Pity there weren't any bank notes."

The detective stopped. "How did . . . ?" He paused again. "Oh, well, never mind. Now I want to see your other potential murderers," he added, with a laugh.

Having completed one or two minor investigations regarding other members of the staff and as to the manners and customs of the partners, Superintendent Dodd took his leave.

"Now mind, Mr. Mildmay," he said as he left the building, "I'm going to check this alibi of yours and if I find it doesn't hold water . . ." He wagged a warning finger and went his way. Mr. Mildmay watched him go with a rather forlorn smile on his harassed face.

Helen had taken no part in the Superintendent's investigations, but she knew her father well enough to realize that he had been upset.

"What's that stupid elephant been badgering you about," she asked as she went into his room.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing. Just some routine questions he was asking."

"Routine grandmothers! He's been worrying you, father; you're not to let him. Just send him to me

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next time—I'll feed him some buns that he hasn't bargained for."

A clerk appeared at the door.

"Mr. Fairbanks to see you, sir."

Mildmay frowned.

"What does he want?" he asked testily.

"It may be news, father. Show him in," said Helen to the clerk. The latter knew by now that confirmation of Miss Mildmay's orders by her father was unnecessary.

A very sober-looking Tom appeared.

"What's up?" enquired the acute Helen.

"I've been fired."

"Fired? Oh, my hat! How sickening! Why?"

"That bank manager wrote to my chief and gave the whole show away. There wasn't anything to be said—of course, he had to sack me."

"I knew what would happen," interposed Mr. Mildmay, only just concealing the note of inevitable "I-told-you-so" triumph in his voice. "It was a most improper procedure. If only you had consulted me beforehand. I could have . . ."

"Oh, dry up, father," said Helen brusquely. "Don't rub it in. The question is—what's to be done now?"

"I just wondered," said Tom diffidently, "whether Mr. Turnbull would give me a job for a bit. I think perhaps . . ."

"Oh, Lord, I forgot. He wants to see you, doesn't he, father?"

"Well, he did say something about it. But I don't for a moment suppose . . ."

"Well, that's for him to say. Come on, Tom, we'll go and see him."

"My dear! I really don't see that you have any standing. Mr. Turnbull . . ."

The remainder of yet another abortive effort at parental control was cut short by the closing of the door.

Tom was somewhat diffident about what he called "butting in" to a busy solicitor's office, but Helen, who had not been unaware of the impression which she had made upon the attractive Mr. Turnbull, had no hesitation. After a very short interval they were shown into the latter's room. Helen took charge of the conversation.

"Good morning, Mr. Turnbull. This is Tom Fairbanks who had the idea about Mr. James Morden having bolted. He's got the sack from his boss and he wants a job with you."

"Steady on, Helen, for goodness' sake," muttered the embarrassed Mr. Fairbanks.

Turnbull laughed.

"Well, that states the case a good deal more clearly and concisely than I usually get it. Why do you want a job with me?" he asked Tom.

"Well, sir, I thought I might be able—that is to say, if you're going to defend Mr. Charles Morden, I should like to be in it. I've got a theory about this

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case—I believe Miss Mildmay told you something about it, sir—and I'd like to follow it up—more or less in an official capacity. I've lost my job over doing it on my own, you see, and this seems just a chance. I know it sounds pretty good cheek, but I might be able to help."

"I'm sure you could, but I've got no vacancy. I've got just about all the staff my business will carry."

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Tom, blushing hotly. "I wasn't cadging for a paid job. I want to be taken on as a volunteer."

"But, my dear chap, how can you afford to do that?"

"Oh, I can manage all right, sir. I've got something of my own. You see, this is how it is. My uncle—my father and mother are dead and he's my guardian—he's a big pot at Somerset House and he wants to get me a job there eventually. But he said I must work up from the bottom—so he put me in as a clerk with the Inspector of Taxes here. There'll be an awful row when he hears what's happened, but it won't be so bad if I can tell him I've got another job. Especially in a solicitor's office—that's almost as good experience as Inland Revenue."

"That makes it a bit different, certainly," said Turnbull. "But look here, I'd like to know why you ran all this risk—of losing your job and very likely messing up your career—for Charles Morden's sake. Do you know him? Is he a friend of yours?"

"No, sir, I don't. . . ." Tom displayed appropriate signs of confusion and Helen came to his rescue.

"We just happened to be talking about it the very night before they disappeared," she said in a casual voice, "and I think I ragged him a bit and so I suppose he wanted to show off. Silly, but rather decent, I think."

"Oh, I see," said Turnbull slowly. "My lady's glove, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir; no, we aren't . . . er . . ." stammered Tom.

"Oh, you're not? I breathe again," said Turnbull, with a quick glance at Helen. The latter was accustomed to this sort of thing, but not perhaps from anyone of quite the type of Turnbull and she was annoyed to find herself blushing. Tom began to wonder whether he might not regret his action in coming with Helen into an apparently dangerous locality, but it was too late to turn back now. After he had elaborated to Turnbull his ideas about James Morden's financial affairs and the possibility of a "ramp," it was arranged that he should come into the solicitor's office, nominally as a junior clerk under instruction (and unpaid), actually to act as a sort of private detective for the defence.

"It's difficult to see at the moment," said Turnbull, "what line the defence is to take—till we can get in touch with Charles Morden, that is. And, of course, he hasn't been charged yet. But I've no doubt that he will be charged as soon as they find him, unless something turns up at the inquest."

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"Wouldn't the best defence be to prove that someone else did it?" Helen's suggestions never lacked scope.

Turnbull laughed.

"It would. How shall we do it?"

"Follow up Tom's idea. Get a look at those bank books."

Turnbull shook his head.

"Can't be done," he said. "Fairbanks has tried unofficially—and I take off my hat to him for a gallant attempt—worthy of St. George's day. Officially, nothing in that way can be done till he's charged; after that—if I'm defending him—I may be able to get a look in. No, we shan't do any good there. But look here, Fairbanks, you may be able to find out something on the quiet. Make some discreet enquiries—your pal at the London and Liverpool might know some more—any entertainment expenses on that line can be charged to the defence exchequer! I'll keep my ears open, too, and I don't doubt that Miss Mildmay's will be equally wide for all their size. Between us we may hear something."

At that, vague as it was, it had to be left.

For the next week all three partners of this self-selected defence organization worked with varying skill and discretion, but unvarying lack of success. Even the previously accommodating Mr. Blidgeon proved a disappointment; to Tom's hospitable approaches he turned a deaf ear—and, indeed, a cold shoulder. Evidently

Tom's misfortune had leaked out; perhaps the bank clerk who had dogged him home from Manchester had been talking among his peers.

For the police, too, the days following the discovery of the body proved something of an anti-climax. The inquest was held and, after identification of the body by the widow, evidence of its discovery by the police, and medical testimony as to the cause of death—either blows or drowning, it was impossible to say which, though the blows undoubtedly came first—was adjourned at the request of the police. Superintendent Dodd pursued quiet investigations in search of a motive and after obtaining a copy of old Mr. Charles Morden's will from Somerset House was noticeably better satisfied with himself.

He was, in fact, ready to complete his case before the coroner but for the fact that he had not yet secured his two witnesses from the S.S. *Snark*. All his efforts to get in touch with that ship had, in fact, proved singularly abortive. She had neither replied to wireless signals, nor had she been seen on her usual route by any incoming vessels that might have been expected to pass her. Still it was now only a question of days before she reached Kingston, her first port of call.

Public interest in the case began to flag and the only press comment now took the form of slightly sarcastic criticism of the police. Even this was losing its popular attraction when, on the 15th April, Liverpool, and, indeed, England and that large part of the



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civilized world that is always intrigued by crime—were galvanized by the announcement that a man answering the description of the disguised Charles Morden, but registered under another name, had been detained by the New York police on landing from the S.S. *Bremen*.

The news was brought to Superintendent Dodd in his office by Inspector Sheppard, who had been responsible for watching the Southampton boats.

"*Bremen!*" exclaimed Dodd. "What on earth boat's that?" He rummaged for his list of sailings. "*Bremen. Bremen.* Ah, here she is. Norddeutscher Lloyd. Why, she doesn't sail from England at all—she goes direct from Bremen to Queenstown and then on to New York. No wonder we missed him."

"But how did he get to Queenstown, sir?"

"Damned if I know. Local boat, perhaps. Or you may have missed him—or we may have here—owing to his disguise. We didn't get that photograph out till Saturday night, you know, and he may have got across before then. Anyhow, we'll soon know now. You'll have to go and fetch him, Sheppard—I've cabled New York that we're sending over a warrant. We'll get a magistrate's warrant—can't wait for the coroner and I'm not going to risk his slipping us now. Look out the next boat in that list—make your arrangements and then come back for instructions. I'll see the Chief. Now we shan't be long," he added to himself, as Sheppard left the room. "I wish we'd got those sailors, though."

It was not necessary, however, for Inspector Sheppard to go to America. Very shortly after receiving the news of the arrest—or rather detention, since no warrant had yet reached New York—Superintendent Dodd was in telephonic communication with the police headquarters of that State. It appeared that Charles Morden, on hearing the grounds of his detention, had admitted his identity and, though refusing to make a statement there, had volunteered to return at once to Liverpool and place himself at the disposal of the police authorities. To save time, therefore, it was arranged that he should be placed in charge of the captain of the *Magnolia*, which was sailing for Liverpool on the 19th April, and that the Liverpool police should meet the boat on its arrival and take him into custody.

In accordance with this arrangement, Charles Morden returned to England, was met in the captain's state-room by Superintendent Dodd, who warned him, showed him the warrant for his arrest, and took him straight to police-headquarters. On the following morning he was taken before the magistrate, was charged with the wilful murder of James Morden and was remanded in custody. Half an hour later he was in Liverpool gaol.

That same afternoon Turnbull received a message from the Governor of the gaol, saying that Charles Morden had asked to see him. It can be imagined with what eager curiosity—apart from other appropriate sentiments—the solicitor looked forward to the prospect of hearing Morden's explanation of his extraordinary

conduct. He lost no time, therefore, in answering the summons. After a brief interview with the Governor he was shown into Morden's cell.

Apart from the alteration to his appearance due to the removal of his beard and trimming of his moustache, Charles Morden was strangely changed. Turnbull had known him as a quiet, rather dull, fellow of placid temperament; now he appeared overwrought and jumpy, his face was haggard and his eyes bright. He looked nervously at Turnbull as the latter entered, as if doubtful of the latter's greeting. Turnbull, however, soon relieved him of any anxiety on that score and his friendly welcome seemed to put Morden more at his ease.

"Well, Morden," said the solicitor. "This is an extraordinary business. I suppose you know all about it; but I'm bothered if I do. I'm glad you sent for me; we've been scratching our heads to know how we could help you, but it was a bit difficult to know what line to go on till we got in touch with you."

"Have you?" said Charles. "That's jolly good of you—to bother about me. Who—who do you mean by 'we'?" There was a curious note of eagerness in his voice as he asked the question.

"Oh, old Mildmay and his daughter—and a young friend of hers who seems to have taken a sort of brotherly interest in you."

Charles's face fell, but he made no further comment, seeming to sink back into himself. Turnbull realized

that the next move would have to come from him.

"Now, then," he said. "Are you going to tell me your side of the story? That'll be the simplest thing; and then I can tell you what you don't know from our end. How'll that do?"

Charles Morden remained silent for a minute, looking out of the small window. Then he slowly shook his head.

"I can't tell you, Turnbull," he said.

Turnbull raised his eyebrows, but for the moment he said nothing.

"I know that sounds pretty feeble," continued Morden. "Of course, I could tell you part of the truth but it obviously wouldn't be the whole truth and I couldn't expect you to believe it was. I think you'd better first of all tell me what's happened here—I've only heard very vaguely—and then I'll know just what I've got to answer."

"All right," said Turnbull. "I'll certainly tell you our end of the story, but I hope you'll change your mind about yours."

Morden listened in silence to the story, as Turnbull knew it, of his partner's death and the circumstances which connected him with it. As the story unfolded itself Turnbull himself realized for the first time how black things looked against his client—his having been the last person seen with the dead man, and that on the very spot where the murder was committed, coupled with his own flight and attempt to disguise himself.

Turnbull did not at the moment know of the discovery of Charles Morden's handkerchief on the dead man's ankle—that piece of information Dodd had so far kept to himself—but even without that knowledge he realized that had it not been for his own interest on Charles's behalf he would certainly have believed him guilty. It was clear, too, that Charles Morden himself fully realized the seriousness of his position. His face became slowly white, and when Turnbull finished he sank his head in his hands and sat for a long while in silence.

At last he shook himself out of his reverie.

"My God!" he said. "It's awful. They'll hang me for a certainty."

"I hope not," replied Turnbull. "There must be an explanation, of course. But you'll have to produce a pretty good reason for clearing out like that."

Morden paced up and down the narrow limits of his cell.

"I can't. I can't!" he exclaimed. "It's not just myself—it's somebody else."

A light dawned on the solicitor.

"O-oh," he said. "It's a woman, is it?"

"Yes, of course, it is. And don't you see, I can't possibly tell what happened—she's a married woman and it would ruin her."

Turnbull looked grave.

"That's pretty awkward," he said. "But surely if your life was at stake she wouldn't expect you not to tell."

"I don't know—it's that that's scorching me so—I don't know—you see . . ." he broke off again and resumed his pacing.

Turnbull realized that the man was shaken by doubts and quite unable to take a decision for himself. He decided to force the pace.

"Look here," he said. "This won't do. How can I possibly advise you—let alone defend you—if I don't know your story?"

"You can't. Of course, I see that. I must just let things rip. They must hang me, that's all," said Morden quietly.

"Rubbish!" said Turnbull curtly. "I'm not going to stand for that; nor is anybody else. Look here, Morden, if you don't tell me, I shall find out for myself and that'll be a jolly sight more unpleasant for her than if you tell me. I shouldn't wonder if the police hadn't found out already."

Morden started.

"The police? Why should they? What's it got to do with them?"

"Of course, it has. Everything to do with you is their business now. Come now, tell me. Don't let's waste any more time."

His decisive manner had an obvious effect upon the weaker character with whom he was dealing. Charles Morden pulled himself together once more and, after a moment's thought, said:

"Very well, I'll tell you. But only if you give me

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your definite promise that you will do nothing unless I give you leave."

With that the solicitor realized that he must be content. Morden sat down on the bed and looked straight in front of him.

"I went away with Lilith Morden," he said.



## CHAPTER XII

### CHARLES MORDEN'S STORY

"I DON'T suppose," said Charles Morden, "that a single soul besides ourselves knows that Lilith and I love each other. She didn't know it herself till a year ago, though I've been in love with her from the first moment I saw her—and that must be nearly seven years. But I suppose I'm a quiet, undemonstrative sort of chap—dull dog, I expect people call me—and I managed to keep it to myself all that time. It helped to make me a 'dull dog' though—other women didn't interest me. Anyhow that's how it was up till a year ago; then one night up at Knowsley I was sitting out in the garden with Lilith—it was in the spring, the first warm night—and suddenly I lost control of myself. I don't quite know what I said or did, but she was pretty angry—or pretended to be. For a time after that she wouldn't come near me; then I began to realize that she was changing—she seemed to want to make it up. I fancy James was treating her pretty badly—he's not been very faithful to her, you know. We gradually saw more of each other, but we did it quietly—we used to go for drives

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together, picking each other up, in either her car or mine, in unlikely places. We were very careful and, as I say, I don't think anyone had the faintest suspicion of it. I hated the hole-and-corner business but, of course, I had to do what she wanted—she was a married woman.

"Then, when I was quite sure that she loved me, I asked her to go away with me, but she wouldn't. She hasn't got any children, so it wouldn't have been so bad for her, I thought, but she said she couldn't face the scandal and I believe she was still really fond of James in a way and didn't like to hurt him, though, goodness knows, he didn't spare her feelings. Not that he wasn't very fond of her in his way—a damned selfish way—and anyone seeing them together would have said they were a devoted couple. At last, about a month ago, something happened between them and she said she couldn't stand it any longer—that she would come with me if I would take her right away out of England. It so happened that I had got a pal over in New York—he was in my crowd in France, and we were wounded and in hospital together—after the War he settled in New York, and started a motor business and asked me to join him. At the time I refused, but I wrote to him again when Lilith said that and he cabled back saying he was delighted to have me.

"I sold out everything I had saved—I couldn't, of course, do anything about my partnership in Morden

## CHARLES MORDEN'S STORY

and Morden—I had to let that go. We arranged to go at the beginning of April; I wanted to go earlier—directly I heard from Burnaby—but Lilith had some absurd woman's reason for not going till then; she was having some clothes made or something, though I told her, we couldn't take much and had better get what we wanted the other side. Anyhow it was fixed that we should sail on the first of April. She was frightfully particular about secrecy—insisted on the most elaborate arrangements for getting away without people knowing we were going together or where we were going. I think she was afraid that James might follow us and make a scene and perhaps even persuade her to go back. So I worked out a scheme that I thought would put people off the track. It was rather fun working it out—I got quite keen on it and took a pride in elaborating details.

"She was to slip out of her house after the servants had gone to bed (James always goes off to his study at about ten and doesn't see her again till the morning—they sleep in separate rooms), and walk down to the Prescott road. I was to pick her up there in my car at eleven, or as soon after as she could get there, and we were to drive to Crewe. We should get there in lots of time for the train we were going to catch—the 1.25 to Swansea—and I was to drop her on the outskirts of the town and garage the car while she walked to the station. We were to go quite separately then, but just to make sure she was all right she was to stand at the

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

bookstall just before the train came in so that I could see her there. The 1.25 a.m. gets to Swansea at 8.5 and there is a train on about three quarters of an hour later to Fishguard, but it wasn't any good our going by it, because the boat doesn't leave Fishguard till midnight and we didn't want to be seen kicking our heels about in an empty station all day. It was better to wait in a big town like Swansea—though waiting anywhere was rather trying work—and catch the London-Fishguard express when it came through in the evening, at about ten o'clock. Just as a little elaboration, I wasn't to go to Swansea, but to get out at Llandilo and make a cross connexion from there to Llanelly, where I should catch the same Swansea-Fishguard train that Lilith was coming in. That would save taking two tickets to Swansea, which might have looked suspicious to an enquirer.

"At Fishguard we were to keep apart—I remaining late to look after my luggage, while she went straight on to the boat. She had already sent such clothes as she wanted by post to Cork—it would have been difficult to get luggage from her house—and was only carrying a small dressing case. From Fishguard we should cross to Cork, stay there three or four nights and go by the *Bremen* from Queenstown on the 5th April. We weren't to see each other—to speak to—between Crewe and Cork, but there we thought we should be safe enough and certainly no one would look for us on a Norddeutscher Lloyd boat. That was the plan,

## CHARLES MORDEN'S STORY

and it seemed safe enough, but it went wrong from the very beginning.

"To start with, as you probably know, James asked me to dine with him at the club that night—31st March it was—the night we'd arranged to go. I tried to put him off, but he said he'd got some urgent business to talk about. I thought it didn't really matter very much, because there'd be plenty of time after that to do what I had to do. We dined at a quarter to eight and a rotten long dinner it was, too—I thought he'd never finish. He talked all the time, about the business, but nothing that seemed to me of any importance—in fact, it was rather rot. He seemed excited and drank a good deal of whisky and port. At last we finished and I thought I could get away, but he said we must go down to the docks and see Keeling. He was so excited by then that I was afraid there'd be a row if I didn't humour him, and I couldn't risk that, so I went with him. We went on board the *Snark* and had a talk with Keeling, but again it didn't amount to anything. When we got back on to the quay he took me by the arm and said, 'Come along beyond the sheds where we can talk without being interrupted. This is what I really want.' I realized that he had got quite quiet and I thought that perhaps there was something after all. We pretended to be looking at the sheds so that anyone who saw us wouldn't wonder why we'd gone that way. Then we went on into the dark part beyond the sheds.

"Suddenly James stopped and faced me and said:

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'You've been making love to my wife!' I was astounded. I hadn't thought for a second that that was what he wanted to talk about. He got very excited again then and gave me some rough tongue that I suppose I really deserved. I didn't say anything—there didn't seem anything to say. At last he stopped and said: 'Get out of this before I put you into the river,' I went—there was nothing else to do. I left him standing on the quay. Of course, I was a good deal upset, not so much at his finding out or at what he'd said, but at the risk of his stopping us from getting away, or at any rate, making a row and upsetting Lilith. Besides, he'd kept me such a time that I was afraid of being late and keeping her waiting, and perhaps even missing the train. So I got back as quick as I could, packed in a great hurry, burnt some papers—nothing very important, but just the sort of private things that one collects and doesn't want other people to pry into—and got off soon after eleven. I hated the idea of her waiting on the road in the dark; it might have been very unpleasant if anyone had come along. So I shoved along as quick as I could and got to the place on the Prescott road, where I was to pick her up at twenty past eleven. She wasn't there.

"I waited and waited and she didn't come. I looked at another road junction in case she'd make a mistake. I went part of the way up to the house, but there wasn't a sign of her. I got in an awful stew, thinking that James had got back and stopped her. Or perhaps



## CHARLES MORDEN'S STORY

she had been at the place punctually, and as I didn't come, had gone back to the house. I was just wondering whether to go to the house myself, when she turned up—at ten past twelve. One of the servants had been taken ill and she couldn't get away before. By the greatest luck James had stayed in Liverpool—he had telephoned during the evening that he was going to sleep at the club.

"We had forty miles to do and an hour and a quarter to do it in—and my old Morris isn't a flyer. There was the barest chance—practically, no chance unless the train was late. We did our best, but we were always behind the clock and we didn't get to Crewe until twenty-five to two. On the chance of the train being late we went straight to the station, risking being seen together, but, of course, it had gone. Then we agreed to separate, Lilith going into the Station Hotel and I to put the car away and kick my heels about till the next train—the 9.22. As I had plenty of time, I thought I would improve our scheme by altering my appearance as much as possible, so, as soon as the shops were open, I went to a barber's and had my beard shaved and my moustache clipped—I suppose it was the stupidest thing I ever did in my life—as things have turned out. At nine o'clock I went to the station, which was then fairly crowded. I saw Lilith standing by the bookstall reading a paper, so I went to the far end of the platform and when the train came in got into the last carriage. She got in somewhere at the front, I saw.



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"Everything went according to plan. Going by the later train didn't matter to our boat connection—we had got to kick our heels about for more than twelve hours anyhow, and it only meant doing some of it at Crewe instead of at Swansea or Llanelly. I changed at Llandilo, at about two, and caught the Swansea-Fishguard train at Llanelly at 10.27. (I've got all those figures tight in my memory.) We got to Fishguard at midnight, and I saw her walk straight towards the boat—I didn't see her actually go on board because I lost sight of her when I was getting my luggage out. In any case, I don't suppose she ever did go on board, because when we got to Cork she never came off the boat—I hadn't looked for her on it. I was absolutely flabbergasted. To this day I don't know why she turned back, but I suppose, at the last moment, she funked it. There wasn't another boat to Cork for two days, but she could have come over to Rosslare by a boat leaving two hours later if for any reason she had missed the boat I came by. There's a train from Rosslare to Cork—I watched it come in that day and the next, hoping against hope that she would still come. There's a boat, too, from Fishguard to Waterford, on alternate days to the Cork one. I watched that too. I went to the hotel we had agreed to stay at—together—you can't think what it meant to me to have to go to it alone. There was nothing from her—not a wire, nor—later—a letter, as I felt sure there would be.

"I stayed there four days. On the second—Satur-

## CHARLES MORDEN'S STORY

day, it was—it was in the papers about me and James having disappeared. I was astonished about James, but I came to the conclusion that he had come after us, and probably didn't know that Lilith had gone back. There was nothing in the paper then to suggest that he had been murdered or I might have gone back to Liverpool—it would have been madness not to, if I had known. But thinking it was all up between Lilith and me, as she didn't write—and I suppose funkng going back and meeting James, and all the fuss—I went on board the *Bremen*, as we had arranged to do and sailed to New York. Of course, my appearance then was quite unlike the photographs in the papers, but somehow or other the police must have got hold of my description, because, as you know, they met the *Bremen* at New York, and came straight up to me. It was ghastly. My God, Turnbull, it was ghastly! Hearing all at once about James being murdered, and my being suspected of killing him."

Charles Morden stopped and for a time sat looking at the floor as if lost in the sadness of his story. Then he looked up at Turnbull:

"Well, old man," he said, "what of it? Do you believe me?"

Turnbull looked at him steadily.

"Charles," he said, "I believe absolutely what you say about James, but why are you telling me a lie about Mrs. Morden?"

Charles sprang up as if he had been struck.

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"What the hell do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I'm not telling you a lie! Every word I have said is true!"

Turnbull shook his head.

"It can't be," he said quietly. "Mrs. Morden never left Liverpool—or, rather, Knowsley."

"Never left Knowsley? But she was with me—she drove beside me all the way to Crewe, and I saw her at Fishguard!"

"Well, if she did go with you, then Miss Mildmay is lying. She says that she saw and spoke to Mrs. Morden in Liverpool on Friday morning—at the time when you say she was travelling with you to Swansea!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RED HAT

THE following morning Turnbull called a meeting of what he called the "Committee of Defence," consisting of himself, Tom Fairbanks and Helen Mildmay. He included Helen in the number because of her intimate knowledge of the affairs of Morden and Morden and because of the high value that he set upon feminine intuition—or the "woman's point of view." Those at least were the reasons that he gave to himself and would have given to anyone else who had the nerve to ask him. Anyhow, he was glad to have her there. Tom was delighted, and Helen herself enjoyed coming, because it was exciting to take part in anything so thrilling as this contest with the police. In her more emotional moments she pictured herself as straining every nerve to save the man she loved, or, at any rate, the man she might love. In the meantime, it was exciting.

At the meeting in his office on Wednesday morning, Turnbull, who on oath of threefold secrecy had got leave from Charles Morden to do so, retailed to his companions the extraordinary story that he had heard on

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

the previous night. In the interest of telling it, he hardly noticed the curious effect that it had upon his listeners. Helen, as a matter of fact, had slowly turned rather red, looked first uncomfortable, then cross, and had remained completely silent—for her a remarkable phenomenon—during the whole half hour of its telling. Tom, on the other hand, after a self-conscious glance at Helen, had become visibly cheerful and interjected various questions and comments of a would-be bright nature, that rather interrupted than helped the course of the story.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said when it was over. "They're a nice couple, aren't they? Who'd have thought that Charles Morden's second name was Juan?"

Helen opened her mouth to snap at him, but, on second (or first) thoughts, fell back upon silent dignity.

"Well, that clears the air a bit, anyhow," continued Tom cheerfully, without specifying the ethereal region that was in his mind. "What do we do now? Take the alibi along to old Dud and get him released? But then who did kill J.M.?—somebody must have. What . . . ?"

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help," interrupted Helen curtly, releasing some of her own emotions and at the same time slightly deflating the exuberant Tom. "There's something wrong, Mr. Turnbull. Mrs. Morden can't have gone to Fishguard—I saw her myself on Friday morning."

"I know. I told Charles that and he simply said that

you must have been mistaken. He swears that she went with him."

"She may have gone to Crewe with him; she didn't go to Fishguard. How can he be sure that she went, if they travelled separately? It may have been someone else he saw."

"I asked him that. He said he couldn't possibly be mistaken. Apart from her being 'the woman he loved' and all that sort of thing, she was wearing a bright red hat and a greyish fur coat. He saw her quite clearly get into the train and not get out again; and he saw her quite clearly at Fishguard."

"Wouldn't the simplest thing be to ask Mrs. Morden?" interposed Tom meekly.

"She wouldn't tell the truth," said Helen decisively.

"It is a bit doubtful, I'm afraid," said Turnbull. "If this story's true and she's prepared to acknowledge it, why hasn't she done so already? I might get it out of her, but Charles Morden won't let me cross-examine her—he swears she'll help him out if it's really necessary, though he hopes that we shall be able to get him off without bringing her into it. He's given me a letter to her. That's one of the things I wanted to consult you about, Miss Mildmay. Had I better take it to her or ask her to come here? She may not like a lot of people like solicitors constantly going to her house—it might get her talked about."

"Ring her up and ask her," said Helen. "If she's got anything to lie about she'll have you up to her

house—she'd be able to tackle you much better in her own drawing-room than in your office."

"Something in that," agreed Turnbull. "Motto: 'Do it now.'" He pulled the telephone towards him and in a few seconds was speaking to Lilith Morden. "You're wrong," he said, hooking up the ear-piece. "One way or the other. She's coming here—says she's got to come into Liverpool this morning, anyhow. Doesn't look much like a guilty conscience, does it?"

"She wouldn't have that, anyway," said Helen coldly. "I must get back to the office now—you don't want me any more, do you, Mr. Turnbull?"

The abrupt and cold departure of one accustomed to linger and have the last word—and generally the last laugh—caused it to dawn on Turnbull's slow but steady mind that all was not as usual with one of his colleagues.

"She's a bit chippy this morning, isn't she?" he said to Tom, as the door closed. "Have I offended her about something?"

"You haven't, but somebody else has!" said Tom, with a grin.

Half an hour later Lilith Morden, dressed in an extremely well-cut black coat and skirt, and with a diamond pin in her black cloche hat, was shown into Turnbull's office. She looked tired, but she smiled cheerfully enough as she shook hands with the solicitor.

"Any news, Mr. Turnbull?" she asked. "How's poor Charles?"

"He's pretty miserable, naturally enough, Mrs. Mor-



den. From the way you speak I take it you don't think he killed your husband?"

"Of course, he didn't," said Lilith decisively. "He hasn't got it in him. I mean, he wouldn't do anything violent like that—he simply couldn't, I'm sure."

"I'm sure, too, Mrs. Morden," said Turnbull gravely. "He asked me to give you this note. I think it's rather private—I'll clear out while you read it."

He moved to the door, but Lilith stopped him.

"Why on earth should you?" she said. "It can't be very startling, can it? And if it is," she added, with a smile, "I might faint and then you ought to be present and apply 'restoratives'—whatever they are. I suppose a well-brought up family solicitor is accustomed to doing that for frail clients—I should think you'd do it rather nicely, Mr. Turnbull." She looked at him steadily out of her large eyes and Turnbull was aware of feeling slightly sick. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," he said.

He watched Lilith closely as she tore open the envelope and ran her eye down the first page of the letter. A slight frown appeared on her face, then she gave a gasp. "What on earth . . ." she began, looking up at him. Her eyes turned back to the letter and she read it through. There was no change of colour, but her face hardened.

"Have you seen this?" she asked, holding it out to him. He did not take it, but shook his head.

"I think I know what it's about," he said quietly.

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"The man must be mad—or else the biggest black-guard that ever walked. He—he accuses me of starting to run away with him and then leaving him (she looked at the letter) at Fishguard or some such ridiculous place. What on earth does it mean? Is he mad, Mr. Turnbull?"

"I don't think so. He told me about it—that you had agreed to go away with him and actually went as far as Fishguard—and there he entirely lost sight of you."

"But it's an absolute lie! There's not a word of truth in it from beginning to end!"

"Not a word?"

"Oh, it's true that he made love to me once, but I choked him off quick enough. I'd forgotten all about it. But this—this is simply ludicrous—it's laughable! Why, a dozen people could prove I didn't go away with him!"

"Charles wouldn't let me ask you any questions about it, Mrs. Morden. He won't let me tell anyone. He said he knew you would see him through if it was necessary."

"That's what he says in this absurd letter—he must be mad, Mr. Turnbull. You don't believe I went away with him, do you?"

Turnbull looked at her steadily.

"I don't know what to believe," he said slowly. "He's the last person I should put down as a liar; he told me a most circumstantial story; and yet it sounds

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impossible—and I shouldn't have said you were a liar either."

"How perfectly charming of you. But as one of us is, I'd better prove it's not me. Now, what am I to prove? What exactly am I supposed to have done. What is the story?"

"He says that you left your house at twelve on Thursday night, joined him outside Prescott, motored to Crewe, missed the 1.25 and had to wait till the 9.22 to Swansea. You changed there and went on to Fishguard which you reached at about midnight—and there he lost you."

"Midnight? On Friday night? So I was away all Friday? Well, I can get half a dozen Primrose Dames to prove I wasn't that!" she said, with a laugh. "I was at Knowsley Hall on Friday afternoon, and in Liverpool—at the Hospital—in the morning. Now what proof do you want? My maid, who called me in the morning—eight o'clock—when I was apparently in Crewe? Will that do? My parlourmaid, who served my breakfast? My cook, my gardener, chauffeur? Miss Mildmay, who had a long talk with me in Liverpool? The matron at the Hospital? Which will you have?"

"Charles didn't want me to do any of this," said Turnbull, doggedly.

"Well, I do!" said Lilith. "I'm not going to have you going about telling everyone—no, I beg your pardon, you aren't to tell anyone, are you?—well, *thinking* I'm a liar, then, to say nothing about my other

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little commandment I'm supposed to have broken. Though I suppose you're so accustomed to that that you wouldn't think much of it. Come along, Mr. Turnbull, you're coming straight back to Knowsley with me."

Turnbull did not enjoy that drive. Sitting so close beside this woman whom his instinct told him to be guilty of a vileness which his reason showed him to be impossible—while his senses recorded eagerly a third and most irrelevant impression—that she was most lovely and desirable, that the faint scent of her was intoxicating. . . . He wrenched his mind back to the problem before him, and tried to reply coherently to the casual remarks with which Lilith punctuated the journey.

Actually it was not much more than twenty minutes before they reached Knowsley House. Lilith let herself in with a latch-key, and, leading Turnbull to the drawing-room, rang the bell.

"Send Yvonne here," she said curtly to the parlour-maid, who came to the door. Within a minute a small, dark girl, of obvious French extraction, in a short black dress, with the merest suggestion of a lace apron, came into the room.

"Madame désire?"

"Yvonne, you remember the morning that Mr. Mor-den was missing? The first of April it was—the day I went to the Primrose League Show at Knowsley Hall—I wore my jade georgette?"

"Mais oui, madame, parfaitement. Madame portait

## THE RED HAT

son costume beige le matin et sa robe jade après le déjeuner."

"Don't talk French, Yvonne. Mr. Turnbull probably knows all about it, but I'm sure it wouldn't be accepted as evidence. Tell him, Yvonne, when and where you first saw me that morning."

"When? Where? Au lit, quand j'ai . . . when I have brought madame her morning tea."

"What time was that, Yvonne?"

"Eight o'clock—a few minutes which way."

"You're quite certain of the day—or to put it another way—has there been any day in the last two months, say, when you *haven't* found me in my bed at eight in the morning?"

"Nevaire. It is always so."

Lilith looked at Turnbull.

"That satisfy you?" she said.

Yvonne retired and was succeeded by the parlour-maid, who, looking half-amused and half-suspicious, bore similar testimony. Turnbull stood glumly by, feeling that the whole business was useless. Lilith was sending for the gardener when he stopped her.

"Please don't go on, Mrs. Morden," he said. "I don't want to hear any more—unless," he added as an afterthought, "you care to tell me whether you ever wear a red hat—a bright red hat?"

Lilith went to the door.

"Yvonne," she called.

Yvonne responded with suspicious promptitude.

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"Yvonne," said Lilith, "do I ever wear a bright red hat?"

The expressive features of the maid would have been sufficient answer.

"*Jamais de la vie!*" she exclaimed.

"Or a grey fur coat?" asked Turnbull.

"Grey? No. Sable. Mink. They are brown. Not grey."

Turnbull walked out of the house with the uncomfortable feeling that he had been made a fool of.

Lilith did not offer to drive him back to Liverpool, and he would have had to spend a long half hour in a tram, had not an acquaintance driving in from St. Helens given him a lift. Back at his office, he at once sent for Tom Fairbanks.

"Fairbanks," he said. "We're up against a snag somewhere. It's perfectly clear that Mrs. Morden didn't go to Fishguard; on the other hand, I can't believe that Charles Morden is making this story up. We must find out where the catch comes. The obvious weak spot in his story is between Crewe and Fishguard, when they travelled separately. Especially Swansea, where she's supposed to have waited for about seven hours. And yet he's certain—absolutely dead certain—about that, too. And she swears—and so does her maid, who, of course, may be a liar—that she hasn't got a red hat or a grey fur coat."

"Looks to me a bit fishy, that red hat," said Tom, knowingly.

## THE RED HAT

"Perhaps. Anyhow, you've got to trace it."

"Me? Trace it?"

"Yes, you. That's what you're paid for—or rather what you aren't paid for. Here, my honorary blood-hound, is your trail. Follow it."



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SAILOR'S RETURN

ARMED with a photograph of Lilith Morden, procured with no great difficulty from a Liverpool photographer, Tom Fairbanks made his way by train to Crewe. Making the same initial mistake as had Superintendent Dodd, he soon realized that nothing was to be discovered from the day staff about the 1.25 a.m. to Swansea, which it had been Charles Morden's intention to catch. He therefore turned his attention to the 9.22, by which, according to Charles' story, both he and Lilith Morden had actually travelled. The trail, however, was now four weeks old, and he was not surprised to find that neither inspectors nor porters could tell him anything about passengers at so busy an hour.

He had nearly decided that his first draw was a blank when he thought of the bookstall; Charles Morden had said that Lilith was to stand by the bookstall as an indication that all was well. He tried the bookstall clerk and at once struck his line. The clerk remembered quite well the lady described by Tom; he even thought he recognized her photograph, but it was the

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red hat and grey fur coat that he went by. He had noticed her in the first place because she was what he called a "good-looker," and secondly because she had stood for a long time—twenty minutes or half an hour, he thought—in front of his stall, apparently reading a paper but he had got the impression that she was really looking out for somebody all the time. He could not say for certain what train she had travelled by, but he had seen her get into one at about the time given by Tom. Curiously enough he could confirm its being on the first of April because he had got wondering at the time what game she was playing and it had struck him that it might be something to do with April Fools' Day. He could not say for certain that she had not got out of the train again, but he had not noticed her do so.

Tom had asked the last question because it had struck him as possible that Mrs. Morden had played such a trick—for some reason yet to be discovered—and so, while giving Charles Morden the impression that she was in the Swansea train, had got back in time for the telephone conversation with Helen Mildmay, which was the first alibi that Tom really trusted. The evidence of the maids as to her being at Knowsley at eight was open to suspicion. This theory did not, however, cover the Fishguard end of the story and Tom made enquiries as to the next train to Swansea, which he found left at four o'clock.

It was now nearly half-past three, but Tom had no

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thought of kicking his heels, even for so short a time. Remembering that Charles Morden had said that his companion had gone into the station hotel to wait, he went there himself to try and confirm this much, at least, of the story. Again he was up against the fact that he was asking a day staff questions that only a night staff could answer. No entry, of course, would appear in the registration book, as the visitor was not staying for a night. Nor did any better success attend him in the dining-room, though here he might have expected it, as the staff that served breakfast was on duty now. Nobody, however, recollected a lady answering the description given by Tom having breakfasted on the first of April, or any other day. There was nothing to be done but wait for the night porter, and that Tom did not intend to do now.

A quarter of an hour still remained before the Swansea train came in and Tom was wondering whether to try and draw some other restaurant where Mrs. Morden might have breakfasted when a sudden thought struck him. Going up to a ticket collector in the station he asked whether it would be possible to discover whether the 1.25 to Swansea had been up to time on the first of April.

"Possible, of course," replied the man. "Signal-box enters all time records. But is it important?"

"Important to the extent of half-a-crown," said Tom, slipping a coin into the collector's hand. The man grinned and, touching his cap, made off down the plat-

## THE SAILOR'S RETURN

form, Tom calling after him that he had only ten minutes to spare. Within eight minutes the collector was back.

"1.25 was twenty-five minutes late on the first of April," he said. "Left at 1.50 a.m. Block on the line at Liverpool, I believe—very unusual."

Thanking the man, Tom jumped into the Swansea train which had drawn up while they were talking. He felt strangely depressed. Somehow he had slipped into the attitude, not of testing Charles Morden's story, but of trying to prove it true. And here was a direct slap in the face—for Charles had stated definitely that he and Lilith had reached Crewe at 1.35, and that the Swansea train had already gone, whereas here was definite proof that it did not leave till 1.50 a.m.

Tom reached Swansea at 9.25 p.m. and caught the 10.5 on to Fishguard—the same London express that Lilith was supposed to have travelled by. He reached Fishguard at midnight, and spent an interesting half hour watching the passengers crowding on to the City of Cork Steam Packet Company's uncomfortable-looking little boat. It was no wonder that Charles Morden had not been able to see his companion actually go on board if he was looking after luggage. The wonder was that he had seen her at all and Tom began to think that this was the point at which his story would break down, confirming his (Tom's) theory that Lilith had got out of the 9.22 again at Crewe, leaving her companion to continue the journey alone. And yet

Morden had been as certain about seeing her here as at Crewe.

As soon as the rush was over, Tom started making his enquiries. He tried the officials at the gangways up to the ship—they told him politely to try a less draughty locality. He tried the ticket collectors and inspectors at the station—they were more civil, but no more helpful. He tried two or three porters without success, and was on the point of giving it up, his theory practically confirmed, when he saw the attendant in charge of the ladies' cloak-room standing in the doorway of her domain, taking a little much-needed air. Here was a last chance; he tried it and, as at Crewe, again struck oil.

The lady, being none too sure as one in her delicate position should talk to a gentleman, none the less consented to do so, provided that the conversation took place upon the platform, the night being fine and warm, rather than upon the aforesaid delicate premises—provided also, of course, though this by implication rather than verbal arrangement, that it were made worth the lady's while to do so. Never, thought Tom, was a half-crown better spent. The lady, which her name was Buckett and not Taffy, London-born and London-bred she was, off the Borough Road, remembered the lady perfectly. Come in, she had, directly the boat train got in and stayed in so long that Mrs. Buckett had wondered whether anything was up and had rattled on the door. On emerging, she had entered into conversation, evading Mrs. Buckett's questions as to her intentions re-

## THE SAILOR'S RETURN

garding the boat and when the latter had gone had enquired for the next train to London, which it seemed funny, her having just come to that god-forsaken hole by train only to go back again the way she had come.

There was no doubt as to the identity of the traveller—the grey coat, the red hat, and finally, the photograph. Mrs. Buckett would take her Gospel on it, and what was more, she had seen her before. It had puzzled her at the time, but the photograph did the trick. Here Mrs. Buckett paused to give effect to her next words, then, digging Tom firmly in the ribs with a gnarled forefinger, gave utterance to her great discovery.

Late the following afternoon, William Turnbull, in his office in Liverpool, received the following telegram: "Not returning yet. Good hunting. Fairbanks."

He at once rang through to the offices of Morden and Morden and passed on this cryptic message to Helen. The latter received it with a coolness that would have disappointed Tom.

"Probably nothing in it," she said. "He always thinks he's going to do something wonderful."

She hung up the receiver and was getting her papers together preparatory to closing down for the day when an office boy announced that Mr. Dorking, third officer of the *Snark*, was enquiring for Mr. Mildmay.

"The *Snark*?" exclaimed Helen. "What on earth . . . ? Show him in at once—no, show him into Mr. Charles's room."

Helen herself hurried into that room and was im-

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

mediately followed by a tall, thin young man, with a pale face and something odd about his complexion.

"Mr. Dorking?" asked Helen. "Did you say you belonged to the *Snark*? How on earth do you manage to be here?"

"I came to see Mr. Mildmay, miss. I . . ."

"He's gone," said Helen curtly. "I'm his daughter—secretary to the partners. But why aren't you in the *Snark*—she's not back, is she?"

"No, miss. I'm back alone. But can you tell me where I can find Mr. Mildmay?"

Helen wanted to shake him.

"I don't know where he is—he went out early. But for goodness' sake tell me what I'm asking you. Why are you back? Has anything happened?"

"No, miss, no. Nothing that I know of. I was put ashore at Queenstown. I got taken ill a couple of days after we sailed. I came out all over spots and temperature, and the Old Man thought I'd got smallpox, so he shoved me ashore quick in case anyone else should catch it. Mr. Millet—the first officer, miss—he shoved me into the isolation hospital. But it turned out only to be chicken-pox," concluded Mr. Dorking, rather sheepishly.

"Oh, I see," she said. "So you don't know anything interesting. But what do you want to see my father about?"

"Well, partly to report, miss. And partly . . . but can you tell me where I can find him?"



## THE SAILOR'S RETURN

"I'm afraid I don't quite know. He'd got some job to do in the town and I know he's going out to see some friends somewhere to-night. You'd better come back in the morning. He'll be here at ten."

"Very good, miss. Thank you."

He was turning towards the door when it occurred to the mischievous Helen to see if she couldn't shock a little interest out of this rather prim young man.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Dorking," she said. "How did you get on with your lady passenger?"

Dorking turned.

"Lady passenger, miss?"

"Yes, the 'little bit of fluff,' as Superintendent Dodd called her. The one Captain Keeling took on board the morning you sailed."

The third officer blushed hotly. He was not used to such frank speech from respectable (as he called them) young ladies.

"Oh, her, miss? I didn't see anything of her."

"Oh, come, you're not going to tell me that Captain Keeling was so selfish as to keep her all to himself," said Helen.

"He didn't see anything of her either, miss," said Dorking, who was evidently gaining confidence after the first shock. "She never came out of his stateroom that she'd been put in—he went into Mr. Millet's cabin himself, and Millet came in with us—and, I'll take my oath, he never went in to her. I watched him," added Mr. Dorking, with a repressed snigger.

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"That's a bit odd," said Helen, who was, however, beginning to be bored with her companion.

"Yes, and it's not the only thing that was odd," continued the mate, now become more talkative. "We thought at one time he was going to put her ashore. We pottered about all day—the day we sailed, that is—and when it got dark we suddenly put about and made for Liverpool. We went back full-speed ahead and as we'd only crawled on the way out, we got back soon after midnight. We didn't come into port, though—we just stood in close to shore and anchored somewhere off the mouth of the river. As soon as we'd dropped anchor, the Old Man ordered off the dinghy—that was when we thought he was going to have her put ashore. But he didn't; he went off in the dinghy himself and didn't take a hand with him."

"Nor her, either?" asked Helen, who was now listening eagerly.

"Nor her, either, miss. He went alone. He was away two or three hours and we were just beginning to wonder what he was up to, when he came back."

"Was anyone with him?" interposed Helen eagerly.

"No, miss, nobody was with him. He was just by himself, as when he went. But he was in a tearing bad temper. Black he was—I wouldn't have gone near him for a hundred pounds."

"But did he say anything?"

"Nothing to speak of—except to curse the hand that missed hooking the dinghy first shot when she came

## THE SAILOR'S RETURN

along side. I thought the chap'd drop into the sea—I never heard the like of it and I've heard some." Mr. Dorking chuckled at the recollection. Helen was too interested in the story to ask him for a sample as she would otherwise probably have done.

"But didn't he say what he'd been doing?"

"Not a word, miss. Not that I heard. Not before I left the ship anyhow. He just ordered the anchor up and off we went on our proper course."

"When did this happen? What night was it?"

"Saturday, miss. We sailed Saturday morning. Second of April it was. And it was that night—or rather Sunday morning—early—that we put back and the skipper went ashore—or wherever he did go."

"Saturday night," said Helen—and to herself: "And the murder was committed on Thursday night. What on earth can be the connexion?"

## CHAPTER XV

### CONSPIRACY

"FATHER," said Helen next morning, as she handed him his coffee at breakfast, "one of the officers of the *Snark* is back."

The coffee cup gave a dangerous lurch and a portion of its contents was transferred to the table cloth.

"What a jumpy old thing you are," said Helen, as she helped her father to repair, as far as possible, the damage.

"You shouldn't fire things at my head like that, dear," retorted Mr. Mildmay. "I know my nerves have got rather jumpy since this sad business began, and the name of the *Snark* is not a very happy one just now. But what officer do you mean? And how is he back?"

"Mr. Dorking, the third officer, father. He came to see you at the office last night after you'd gone. He seemed very anxious to see you, but I didn't know where to find you, so I tackled him myself."

"You—tackled him?"

"Yes. I asked him what he wanted. At least, I asked him about their lady passenger, just to pull his leg."

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"Oh, my dear, you shouldn't have done that. It isn't at all a nice subject for a young girl. I don't know how you came to hear of it—I particularly didn't tell you myself."

"Oh, Mr. Turnbull told me, or the fat policeman, or somebody. Murder will out, you know, father—and so will the other commandments."

Mr. Mildmay realized that his daughter was in one of those moods when to expostulate with her was only to drive her to further lengths of impropriety—as he considered it.

"I hope you didn't have much conversation with him, dear. These sailors are very rough in their speech sometimes."

"Oh, butter wouldn't melt in Master Dorking's mouth," declared Helen, with misplaced confidence. "But he told me something jolly interesting, though." She proceeded to tell her father the story of Captain Keeling's return and his solitary visit in the dinghy to some unknown destination. Helen could see that her father was strongly moved by the story, which did not lose dramatic force in her telling of it.

"How extraordinary! How—how very odd," was however, his only comment.

"Odd, to say the least of it," said his daughter. "I think there's some connexion. Perhaps we shall hear some more about it this morning—I told him to come and see you at the office at ten."

But Mr. Dorking did not come to the office at ten,

nor at any other hour of the morning. Helen got more and more impatient.

"Look here, father," she said, when, on returning after the luncheon interval, she found that the third officer had not yet arrived. "I can't wait for this chap any longer. I'm going round to tell Mr. Turnbull about it."

"But, my dear child," expostulated Mr. Mildmay. "What is there to tell Mr. Turnbull? Captain Keeling's movements can't possibly have anything to do with his client. I don't at all like such stories spread about—it gives the firm a bad name."

"What does? Captain Keeling's amours? How do you know this was an amour? And if anything gives the firm a bad name I should think murder does. Besides, Mr. Turnbull is the firm's solicitor; he wouldn't 'spread it about,' as you call it. Anyhow, I think he ought to know it and I'm going to tell him." Helen was nothing if not thorough in her arguments. Her father, however, was not convinced.

"I can't see the necessity," he said. "And I don't like the way you run after these young men."

"Father!" Helen blushed hotly and glared at the unfortunate Mr. Mildmay. "How dare you! How dare you say I run after Mr. Turnbull?"

Mildmay stuck to his guns. His blood was up.

"I think you do, Helen. You seem to have no modesty, no proper feeling. First, you behave as if Mr. Charles Morden was your—as if you had some special

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reason for being upset when he got into trouble; then you run about all over the place with this young Fairbanks; and now it's Mr. Turnbull—"Mr. Turnbull says this," "Mr. Turnbull thinks that,"—it's not nice. I don't like it."

But he had to lump it, as Helen herself would have said in a lighter moment. Now, she just banged out of the room and went straight round to Mr. Turnbull's office.

The latter was suitably impressed by her story.

"It does look fishy," he said. "But what on earth can it mean? Morden was dead by then—look here, though. Where was Keeling on the night of the murder? Do we know he wasn't on the quay? He may have been there all the time—perhaps watching the two Mordens when they were quarrelling about Lilith Morden. Isn't it possible that he may have killed James after Charles had gone? Look here . . ."

"But didn't they say that they left the dock together while the Mordens were still on the quay?" interposed Helen. "That other mate was with Keeling—they went out together, didn't they?"

"They said so, but they may both have been in it. They may have made up that story."

"But the watchman. Didn't he say he saw them go—and he would know when they came back."

"They may have squared him. There may be a flaw in their story somewhere. We must find out. Look here, let's go round and see Dodd. He ought to



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know about the *Snark* coming back, and he may be able to help about the other part of it."

Superintendent Dodd was evidently intrigued by the story of the *Snark's* mysterious return, though he pretended to treat it lightly. He made the flippant suggestion that Captain Keeling had been dissatisfied with the lady of his choice and had gone back to look for something better. Turnbull, uncertain how Helen would take such levities, hurried on to his theory regarding the possibility of Keeling being the actual murderer. The detective, however, was in no way impressed.

"When did he do it, then?" he asked. "He left the dock with Millet while the two Mordens were still on the quay. He didn't go back to his ship till eight o'clock next morning—the first mate was in charge that night—I know, because I made it my business to find out. The police do make it their business to find out things, you know, Mr. Turnbull; it isn't only the amateurs who do a bit of thinking."

Turnbull took no notice of this professional gibe, and Dodd continued:

"I got that from Millet himself—oh, but you say he's in the plot with Keeling, so you won't trust his evidence. Well, I got it, too, from the night-watchman, Potts. He's not much to look at, but he's a trustworthy old chap; you'll find difficulty in shaking his credit as a witness, Mr. Turnbull. And I don't doubt, if you like to enquire, you'll find exactly where

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Keeling was, from the time he left the dock with Millet at nine o'clock on Thursday night down to the time he came back at eight o'clock on Friday morning. But what do you want to bother with him for, Mr. Turnbull? We all know who did the business; it's as plain as a pikestaff."

Turnbull shook his head.

"It may be to you," he said, "but it isn't to me. There's only one thing I'm certain of, and that is that Charles Morden isn't a killer."

Superintendent Dodd laughed.

"Of course, it's your business to say that, Mr. Turnbull," he said. "You're paid to defend him; I'm paid to do the other thing."

"I should have thought you were paid to find out the truth," said Helen, who was irritated by the detective's condescending manner.

"So I am, miss," said Dodd, who was not easily ruffled by a pretty girl, whatever he might be by his own sex. "And I am finding it out. In fact, I think I may say I have found it out."

Realizing that nothing was to be gained by prolonging the interview, Turnbull led the way out into the street.

"What do you think of him, Miss Mildmay?" he asked.

"Pompous ass," was Helen's uncompromising reply. Turnbull laughed.

"Pompous, yes," he said. "I don't feel quite so sure

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about the other part. Asses don't as a rule get made detective-superintendents. I fancy there's more in him than meets the eye."

"And that's saying a good deal," commented Helen.

"Anyway, we didn't get much change out of him over my Keeling idea."

"No. I'm afraid we've wasted our morning. My fault in a way, I'm afraid," said Helen.

"I've not wasted mine," said Turnbull, smiling at his companion. Helen found herself blushing, a habit that seemed to have grown on her lately.

"I must get back to the office," she said.

"I think we ought to have some tea, first."

"Oh, nonsense," said Helen, laughing. "Why, it's only a quarter past three."

"I know what," said Turnbull. "We ought to go and visit the spot where the body was found. Come on. I've got my car at the office and it's a lovely afternoon."

It was a flimsy excuse, but Helen was still sore with her father for his unjustified accusations, and her way to refute them was, paradoxically, to go a little further in the same direction than she would otherwise have done. To what extent the interests of Charles Morden were advanced by this expedition it is difficult to say; certainly no startling developments arose from it; but neither William Turnbull nor Helen Mildmay referred to the day again as having been wasted.

It was Saturday morning before Tom Fairbanks

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returned and then he walked into Turnbull's room as soon as the latter arrived, obviously bursting with information. His first words confirmed the impression.

"I want a rise," he said.

"What have you done to justify such an application?" said Turnbull firmly.

"Solved the problem," replied Tom triumphantly, his broad smile spoiling the business-like effect that he was trying to create. Turnbull remained calm.

"Very well. Ask the cashier for a twenty-five per cent. increase. Good morning," and he returned to his papers.

"No, but look here, I say . . ." Tom burst out, unable to restrain his eagerness any longer. "I really have solved it—not the murder, I mean, but what you told me to find out! Don't you want me to tell you about it?"

"Of course, I do," said Turnbull, with a grin. "But you asked for a rise; so I thought I'd get it myself. Now, then, fire away."

"Oughtn't Miss Mildmay to hear it?" said Tom anxiously.

Turnbull laughed.

"Hear your triumph you mean, I suppose. All right, ring her up."

Within ten minutes Helen had arrived and the great revelation began.

"Charles Morden's telling the truth all right," said

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Tom. "At least, as far as he knows it he is. But that's not saying a great deal. But perhaps I'd better begin at the beginning."

He recounted his investigations at Crewe and Fishguard.

"It was the greatest stroke of luck finding that old bird," he went on. "Up till then I was sure that Morden had been wrong about seeing her at Fishguard—I thought probably it was some other passenger from London, or somewhere, dressed in the same way. But the admirable Buckett soon put me right on that point. She had slipped into the lav. and stayed there evidently long enough to be sure of the other passengers having gone on board, in case, I suppose, Morden asked anyone about seeing her. Then she came out and talked to Buckett, and Buckett recognized her. At least, she did when I showed her the photograph. She said her name was Vanda Thirsk and she was an actress. Buckett had often seen her at the Old Vic—she used to play small Shakespeare parts apparently, till she got on a bit. That was all she could tell me, but it was enough.

"Luckily for me, I didn't have to hang about long at Fishguard. The Rosslare and Waterford boats came in not long after the Cork boat sailed, and I simply got into the boat express—3.15—and slept all the way to London. There was an empty sleeper, and as I'd got to go first anyhow on that train, I thought I might as well blue the extra quid and have a good sleep—I was pretty tired. I got to London, breakfast and all, soon

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after nine, and started off full of buck to find my actress. I thought it would take me about ten minutes, but I soon found out my mistake. No one in that profession seems to get up before lunch-time—not even the agents.

“I tried Keith Prowse first of all. Of course, they were there, but they’d never heard of her—nor had Cecil Roy. They put me on to one or two theatrical agencies, and that was where I found I’d got up too early—nobody who knew anything was about. I went back after lunch and was kept waiting for hours—along with dozens of other poor wretches hunting for a job. When I did see the principal he didn’t know anything—or didn’t care. That happened twice, and then it was closing time. I had some dinner, and then went round to the Pantheon. I’d discovered from K.P. that a friend of mine, Dick Virtue, was playing there in a thing called ‘Happy Hopscotch,’—awful tripe. I went round after the show and saw him. He didn’t know Vanda, but he promised to take me round to his own agent—Newton Paile—next morning.

“That was where I struck oil again. Paile was quite a different chap to the others I’d seen. He was at the office quite early in the morning; took a lot of trouble and soon hunted her up, and all about her—just what I’d expected. Vanda Thirsk had been a Miss Fortnum! You remember, Helen, you once told me that Mrs. Morden had been a Miss Fortnum and that she had

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been married at Wimbledon? So I went down there and buzzed about among Registrars and Vicars and people and found out that there had been two Miss Fortnums—twins—one called Lilith and one Marion. Marion had taken the wrong turning or something during the War, and had gone on the stage, and never again darkened her stern parents' door. That was before Lilith married, of course, so that would be why nobody here knew about her. Obviously, that was Vanda Thirsk.

"I went back to London and—I had found out from Paile that she was playing at the Coventry, a tiny part—went to a matinée in the afternoon and saw her. She wasn't so like as I had expected—darker hair and not so thin, and brighter colouring—but then that would be make-up, and no doubt, if she wanted to, she could be a good deal more like Mrs. Morden. I had half a mind to send a note round and ask her out to tea, but with my usual modesty I thought she probably wouldn't come and if she did I should probably make a mess of things. Leave that to you, Mr. Turnbull—I expect you know the ropes."

"Thank you for your confidence," said Turnbull, gravely.

"Even then," continued Tom, "I didn't quite see what had happened. So I caught the 7.30 to Crewe—I didn't get out of the matinée till five so I missed the 5.20—and got there about eleven. The night-porter at the station hotel remembered her all right—Lilith or



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Vanda, whichever it was! She had gone in at about 2 a.m.—he didn't remember the exact date, but I don't suppose that matters, does it? She didn't stay long—about half an hour, he thought. Then she went out and didn't come back, nor anyone like her. That rather stuck me for a time, but I thought I'd try some other hotels. I tried several all over the town—most of them were shut at that hour and none of them knew anything, but at last I struck a little place—quite close to the station, of course—that kept open at night for people travelling. They remembered all about it.

"A lady like this photograph had come in from London at about eleven on the night of the 31st March. She had had some supper and said she was going to sit up and might leave by a train about one. She was dressed in something dark, with a brown fur coat and a dark hat. She went out about one and came back an hour later, saying she had decided to go by a later train, but that somebody would be calling for her. She gave her name as Mrs. Norris. Soon afterwards another lady did enquire for her and the night-porter noticed how very like Mrs. Norris she was. They went into the sitting-room, where there was a fire, and presently Mrs. Norris came out and went away. At least the porter thought it was Mrs. Norris, because she was wearing a dark hat. The other lady stayed in the sitting room till morning, had some breakfast and went away—presumably to the station, at about half past eight—he knew that was the time because he was re-

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lieved then by his mate. This lady was wearing a grey fur coat and a red hat.

"Well, that showed how Morden had been misled—of course, the two sisters had changed coats and hats and their likeness is sufficiently startling to deceive him at that distance. It only remained to find out how Mrs. Morden got back to Knowsley, and that was easy enough. I found an open-all-night garage not far away and they looked up their hire book for the night of the 31st of March and found that a lady had hired a car at 2.45 a.m. to drive her to a place near Knowsley Park. The car had put her down in a side road at half-past four and returned to Crewe. So there you are; that's the pretty story."

There was silence when Tom had finished. Everyone was probably feeling too sick to speak. What was the object of all this intrigue was not at all clear, but it was sufficiently evident that a trick of a particularly cruel character had been played upon Charles Morden, and played by the woman he loved and who pretended to love him.

"There's just one thing that puzzles me," said Tom. "I found out at Crewe that the 1.25 was nearly half an hour late that night—or rather morning. It didn't go till 1.50. Why was it that Charles Morden didn't go by that?"

"Didn't he say that he had asked at the station when they got there—just after 1.30 wasn't it—and it had gone?" said Turnbull.

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"I expect it was she who asked," said Helen, "and told him a lie about it. Or better still, she didn't ask at all—otherwise somebody might have remembered her asking and wondered why she didn't go by it. Probably she just went and came out again and said it had gone."

"But why?" said Tom.

"Because she'd got to get back before anyone was up, fathead, but didn't want him to go by that train. Perhaps it was easier to arrange the change with her sister that way, or she wanted his story to sound more than ever absurd."

"But supposing *he* had got out and enquired and they had had to go by that train?"

"Probably the sister would have gone, too, and they'd have changed places in the train. Mrs. Morden could probably have got out at Shrewsbury and motored back even then in time to be called at eight. The night-porter did say that the sister went out about one—no doubt she went to the station in case that happened."

"Well, what on earth's it all for?" enquired Tom.

Turnbull had been silent all this time. Now he spoke.

"I can't see yet, what it's for. It looks very ugly. Whether it means that this woman had to do with the killing of her husband, I don't know, but one thing's quite clear—it's conspiracy! Conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SECOND ACCOUNT

"CONSPIRACY!" exclaimed Helen. "I say, that sounds frightfully exciting. Can we get her put in prison?"

"That depends," said Turnbull. "We shall have to prove it in the first place—it may not be easy."

"I tell you one bit of proof that'll be jolly convincing," interposed Tom. "We shall be able to prove that Vanda Thirsk's part was played by an understudy on the night of the 31st of March—and on the 1st of April!"

"How do you know?"

"Well, of course, it was. How else could she have got down to Crewe by eleven? That'll take some explaining."

"When you two have finished," said Turnbull. "We shall have to prove, too, that the conspiracy was to defeat the ends of justice. It's no good just proving the trick—she'd just say it was a practical joke."

"Well, but anyhow we can get Mr. Morden released, can't we? What are you going to do—go and tell the police?"

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Turnbull shook his head.

"There's nothing in this to justify his release," he said. "He's accused of murdering James *before* he started for Crewe. All this does at the moment, as far as the police are concerned, is to provide a plausible motive, which I gather they aren't particularly satisfied about at the moment. A man wouldn't be likely to murder another one on the night he ran off with his wife—there'd be no point in running then. But if he had a row with him, as Charles admits was the case, he might hit him a bit harder than he intended, and then get in a panic and try to hide the body. At least, that's what the prosecution would say. No, I don't think I shall tell Superintendent Dodd about this just yet."

"But isn't it going to be any use to us, then?" said the crestfallen Helen.

"Oh, yes, it'll be that all right—it's the beginning of the solution, or I'm a Dutchman. But we shall have to work it out carefully and not let them know what we've discovered. In the meantime, though, I think it'll be of immediate use in one way—it'll help me to get a look at those bank books—the West of Scotland Bank ones I mean."

"How on earth?" asked Tom.

"There's a thing called the Bank Books Evidence Act that enables the court to authorize the inspection of bank books provided it is satisfied that such inspection is relevant to the case. I think the suggestion of conspiracy might get me the order if I worked it cleverly.

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If I did that, though, the police would have to know about it, if not the public. But I might use this to work the bank manager quietly—especially if I promised not to use it unless it was relevant. Anyhow, I shall try.”

Helen looked at him in admiration.

“Mr. Turnbull, how wonderful you are!” she said.

Tom frowned.

“I say, that’s a bit thick,” he said. “You never said I was wonderful—and I unearthed the whole thing!”

“Never mind, Fairbanks,” said Turnbull. “She means you really, that’s why she said me. Women, I know them! Anyhow, your salary’s doubled.”

Tom laughed.

“Thank you for—twice nothing,” he said.

Turnbull wasted no time. He rang through to the Manchester branch of the West of Scotland Bank, and, stating that the business was urgent, asked if the manager could see him early that afternoon, even though it was a Saturday. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he went straight down to Lime Street Station, caught the 12.5, and at a quarter past two was knocking on the closed doors of the bank. He was shown at once into the same room in which poor Tom had played a gallant fly to the managerial spider.

“Good of you to see me, Mr. Burns,” said Turnbull, who had thought it politic to discover the manager’s name beforehand. “I’ve come about a matter on which you have already been troubled by a young friend of

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mine. His efforts very properly resulted in the sack; I hope mine will be less disastrous. I refer to the case of Mr. James Morden."

Mr. Burns allowed the flicker of a smile to cross his face.

"The young man had a poor opinion of my intelligence," he said. "I liked him. I was sorry to have to report him."

"You had no alternative; it was a most improper procedure on his part. I'll tell you unofficially some time why he did it. Now, Mr. Burns, I've come on the same errand, but with better credentials. I am representing Mr. Charles Morden, who, as you are no doubt aware, is charged with the murder of his cousin, James. I have reason to believe that James Morden kept a separate account with you, the existence of which he did not disclose, either to the revenue authorities or to me—his legal adviser—or to anyone else that I am aware of. I have further reason to believe that the implication of my client, Mr. Charles Morden, in this crime has been brought about by a deliberate conspiracy with which this banking account may or may not be connected, and in order to prepare my client's defence it is essential for me to examine it. I should say that I believe the account to be connected with some fraudulent undertaking of Mr. James Morden, and I hope by this link to connect the crime of which Mr. Charles Morden is accused with the conspiracy of which I have spoken, and which I can definitely prove.



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"I believe that I could obtain an order from the court authorizing me to inspect the books, but if I can see them privately by the courtesy of yourself and your directors I should prefer to do so. In the first place it would save a good deal of time; in the second, it would—in the event of my suspicions being unfounded—save publicity regarding the account. In order to satisfy you that I have good grounds for my suspicions I am prepared to tell you all that I know myself, but I must, of course, ask you to regard it as being absolutely confidential."

Turnbull then told the manager of the trick played on Charles Morden and of his doubts regarding James Morden's income and the curious incident of Captain Keeling's cabin (the latter he had learnt of from the Chief Constable). When he had finished, the manager nodded his head.

"I am not surprised to hear this, Mr. Turnbull," he said. "I have had my own suspicions regarding this account—it is so largely on a cash basis. I may say that I anticipated this request and obtained from my directors permission to show the books to the police or to any authorized person—you undoubtedly come within the latter category. The only stipulation is that the books should be examined in my presence."

The manager left the room and returned shortly with a ledger.

"The account has been running just three years," he said. "You will see that the credit entries are very

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few, but they are large—ranging from £1,500 to £6,000 and spaced at intervals of roughly four months. There are no exactly corresponding dates, you see, but they are never closer together than three and a half months (except the last one), and there is only one interval of more than five—that was last year—there were no credits then between February and August. You will notice, too, that the credits last November and the two this March are the largest of all.”

“Just half a minute, Mr. Burns,” said Turnbull. “How were these payments made—in cash, I see, but how—treasury notes?”

“No. I looked into that and found (again with the exception of the last one) that they were all made in American dollars.”

Turnbull whistled.

“By Jove, that’s interesting,” he said, “to say the least of it. And these cheques drawn to ‘self’ on the debit side—were they drawn in English or American money?”

“English, all of them. They’re pretty regular, you see, with three or four exceptions. He used to come in about once every three or four weeks and draw out £600 or £700, generally in five or ten pound notes. I should think you would find that he paid a large part of his ordinary accounts in cash, though he may have used it for gambling. These large credits, of course, might be winnings, but they are so regular, and it’s odd that they should all be in dollars. Some of them might

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be, easily enough—won from Americans just over, sailors and so on—but it's not likely that all would be."

"No," agreed Turnbull. "There's more in it than that. It's intensely interesting. Not only the dollar credits, but the size of the whole thing. Drawing out £600 or £700 a month means an expenditure something like £8,000 a year. He's living high, but nothing like that. Some of it must be gambling."

"May not some of it be for the business—whatever it is—that's bringing in the credits? Evidently it is all run on a cash basis."

"Yes. Yes, you're probably right there. If that's so, we can't distinguish between what he draws for his own use and what he draws for his mysterious business. Unless these larger sums have something to do with it. As you say, most of the cheques drawn to 'self' seem to be for amounts of £600 to £700, and pretty regularly once a month, but every now and then there are bigger ones, ranging from £1,000 to £1,500, and the last is by far the biggest of the lot—close on £6,000."

"Yes," said the bank manager. "I think those are explained by the last credit, which is for £5,500 and was in the form of a cheque drawn by a firm of brokers. It is fairly evident that the large cheques drawn to 'self' were used for investment—though why he should have done it by cash instead of by cheque I don't know—and that this credit on the 8th of March from his brokers was the result of their having sold his securities."

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Turnbull nodded.

"I see," he said. "And the climax comes on the 20th of March, when he draws the whole lot out—£5,895. Did that close his account?"

"It did."

"So that you were not likely to take any more interest in him?"

"That is so."

For a time Turnbull sat turning over the pages of the ledger.

"It's difficult for a layman to grasp it all straight away. I daresay you'll let me come back and have another look if necessary?"

"Certainly. At any time you like."

"And in the meantime may I make a note of these credit dates?"

Mr. Burns nodded.

"On the agreed understanding," he said.

Turnbull jotted down the dates in question, thanked the manager for his help, and took his leave. He would have liked to talk the matter over with somebody else; even the inexperienced Tom Fairbanks would have been a help, if only as a clearing-house for his own ideas. But he had obtained this vital information on the very clear understanding that, for the present at any rate, it was to be treated as confidential and to that understanding he must loyally adhere.

By the time he got back to Liverpool it was nearly six o'clock, and he decided to put the whole case out

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of his mind until Monday, hoping then to return to it with renewed vigour. He played a game of tennis before dinner, and one of poker after it. On Sunday morning and afternoon he played golf, but by Sunday evening he was tired of these amusements and allowed his brain to return to its absorbing problem.

It seemed obvious to Turnbull now that James Morden had been leading a double existence of some kind and that he had for the last three years been obtaining money from some source of which nobody connected with him was aware. He knew the circle in which Morden had moved fairly well, and he had made some discreet enquiries, but, apart from suggestions of gambling or racing winnings, he had gathered no inkling of the source of this supplementary income. His inspection of the bank books, however, had supplied him with two important clues; the first, the fact that the money had been paid into the bank in American dollars; the second, the list of dates on which those payments had been made.

Although he was debarred from explaining the meaning of this list to anyone beside Mr. Burns, it was open to him to use it for the purpose of making enquiries, and it seemed to him that the best place to try first was in the office of Morden and Morden. It was his intention to go there the first thing on Monday morning, but other work kept him in his own office till well into the afternoon, and it was nearly four when he got to the shipping offices and enquired for Mr. Mildmay.

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The manager took his visitor into Charles Morden's room, which was becoming recognized as the conference room for discussions on the problem in which they were all so closely bound up. Turnbull explained that he was engaged upon the theory, originated by Tom Fairbanks, that James Morden had a secret source of income. Mr. Mildmay shook his head.

"I can't think that there's anything in that, sir," he said. "I've known Mr. James now for something over twenty-five years and if there was anything of that kind, surely I should have got some inkling of it?"

"One would think so," agreed Turnbull, "but I have got some confirmation of the idea from a fairly reliable source. The only thing I can say about it is that this income is apparently connected in some way with certain clearly-defined dates. I've got a list of the dates here and I want you to look at it and see if it conveys any suggestion to you, especially in connection with the theory we are discussing."

Turnbull took from his pocket the list of dates which he had copied from the bank ledger and which referred to the credit payments in James Morden's account. It ran as follows:

27 May	'24	10 Nov.	'25
12 Sept.	'24	28 Feb.	'26
30 Dec.	'24	1 Aug.	'26
13 April	'25	18 Nov.	'26
29 July	'25	2 March	'27

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He had not included the entry of the 8th of March '27, which he knew referred to the cheque from Morden's brokers.

"There you are, Mr. Mildmay," he said. "Take a good look at it and see if you can interpret it."

Turnbull leant back in his chair and lit a cigarette, while the manager put on his spectacles and scrutinized the paper. It seemed to the lawyer that the room was gloomier than when he last saw it. Perhaps, he thought, it had not been dusted lately, or there might even be a psychological explanation connecting it with the gloomy condition of its owner's affairs. Finally, it occurred to him that the real explanation was that, on the last occasion he had been in it, it had been brightened by the presence of Miss Helen Mildmay. This was a defect that might yet be remedied.

"Make anything of it?" he asked.

The manager shook his head.

"What about calling your daughter in? Woman's instinct and all the rest of it."

"I don't think my daughter could throw any light on the matter if I am unable to," replied Mr. Mildmay, primly.

This was too direct a rebuff to be overcome and Turnbull was in process of giving up his bright idea when the door opened and it came in. Turnbull sprang to his feet.

"Good afternoon, Miss Mildmay," he said, with evident enthusiasm.



## THE SECOND ACCOUNT

"Good afternoon, Mr. Turnbull," replied Helen, with perfect equanimity. "There's a man from the Chamber of Commerce wants to see you, father."

Mr. Mildmay left the room and his daughter prepared to follow him, but the lawyer checked her.

"Don't go, Miss Mildmay," he said, eagerly. "I want your help. I've got a list of dates here that may have some connection with James Morden's secret income. I want you to look over it and see if it suggests anything to your mind—anything that may explain the source of these pay—of the income we think he was getting."

Helen picked up the list and glanced at it carelessly.

"I'll look at it some time. I'm busy just now," she said coolly, and walked out of the room.

Turnbull swore softly.

"Damn these women," he said. "They're all the same."

He waited a few minutes, but, as Mildmay did not return, he picked up his hat and walked out of the building. On the steps of the front door he ran into Superintendent Dodd.

"Hullo, Mr. Turnbull," said the latter. "I was just by way of bringing Miss Mildmay news of her sailor boy."

"What sailor boy? What do you mean?" asked Turnbull, a note of anger in his voice.

"The one you and she were telling me about the other day. The third mate of the *Snark*."

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

"Dorking?" said Turnbull, eagerly. "What about him?"

"Didn't she say she was expecting him to turn up here that morning—the morning after she'd seen him—and that he didn't come?"

"I believe she did. Why?"

"Well, I've found out why he didn't come. He's in hospital with something not far off a fractured base—unconscious. He was picked up in an alley down by the south docks—evidently run into a gang of toughs. They'd stripped him of everything, but we identified him by his cap. Not much more to be got out of him for a month or two, if ever."

## CHAPTER XVII

### EXPORT AND IMPORT

ON the following morning, a little before twelve, Tom Fairbanks, returning to the offices of Turnbull, Vent and Turnbull from some minor investigation, was surprised to find Helen Mildmay in the waiting room.

"Hullo, Helen," he said. "Have you come to see me?"

"No. I've come to see Mr. Turnbull," was the uncompromising reply.

Tom's face fell.

"Is it about the Morden case?"

"It is, my bright one."

"I say, I wish you wouldn't be so stand-offish. I'm in the business just as much as anyone. I think you might tell me what it is."

"What what is?"

"What you've come to see Turnbull about."

"I told you. About the Morden case."

"Yes, but what about it?" said the exasperated Tom. Helen relented slightly.

"Something jolly interesting. But I don't know yet whether I can tell you. It may be confidential."

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

"Oh, I say, that's a bit thick. Isn't it all 'confidential' and aren't I in it all? I've never hidden anything from you, Helen."

"Well, you'll have to wait till I've seen Mr. Turnbull, anyhow."

"How do you know you're going to see him? He doesn't seem too anxious to see you," said Tom viciously.

"Oh, doesn't he? That shows how much you know. Why, yesterday . . ."

Helen was interrupted by the arrival of an office boy.

"Mr. Turnbull's compliments, Miss, and he's engaged just now. If it's about the Morden case, he says, Mr. Fairbanks will see you."

Helen bit her lip with vexation and Tom had the wisdom not to take advantage of his score.

"Come along, Helen," he said. "I've got a tiny little room Turnbull fitted up for me. We can talk about it there."

Helen knew perfectly well that Turnbull was getting a bit of his own back after her rebuff to him the previous evening. She was in doubt whether to go straight back to her own office and leave him to whistle for the information she had to give, or to follow her own inclination to talk it over with Tom. The latter's magnanimity, coupled with the realization that to turn tail was to recognize rebuff, turned the scale.

Tom's was indeed a "tiny little room"—it was little more than a cupboard, with a slit of window. The

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"fitting up" consisted of a small table, a chair, a bit of blotting paper, a Bradshaw, and a map of Liverpool. It was not too small for Tom, though, when Helen was there too. He perched himself sideways on the table.

"Fire away," he said.

"Mr. Turnbull gave me a list of dates—he didn't say what they were—and asked me if they conveyed anything to me. I had a look at them last night, and couldn't make anything of them. But this morning, when I went over them again more carefully, I noticed that they were all—or nearly all—more or less the same distance apart—something like four months. Then it occurred to me that that was roughly the time between sailings of two of our boats—the ones on the West Indies trip, the *Frozen Mit* and the *Snark*. That felt a bit warm, but what settled it was the one exception to the four month interval. On the list there was one gap of five months—from the 28th of February, 1926, to the 1st of August. I looked up the sailings of the two boats and found that the *Snark* was laid up for a month last March for repairs. She didn't sail till April and was back at the end of July. When I checked all her return dates, I found that they tallied almost exactly—within a few days and always earlier—with the dates on the list. There's not the least doubt that that list, whatever it is, has got something to do with the *Snark*."

"By Jove, Helen," said Tom, gazing with deep admiration into the brown eyes so close to him, "you're simply wonderful! Helen, I do . . ."

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

"Yes, but I don't," interrupted Helen, firmly. "What I want to know is what this list of Mr. Turnbull's is."

"Oh, he'll tell us quick enough," said Tom.

"I'm not so sure. He was pretty close about it yesterday."

"Well, if he doesn't, he's a dirty dog," began Tom, when the door opened and Turnbull appeared.

"Who's a dirty dog?" he enquired.

Tom blushed, but said nothing.

"Silence seems to indicate me. Good morning, Miss Mildmay. I am sorry I was engaged when you called. I hope Fairbanks has been able to tell you what you wanted to know."

"I didn't want to know anything—at least, I do, but I came here to tell you something. I've told Tom now, and he can tell you, if you want to know it."

Helen rose, but Turnbull stood with his back to the door.

"Hearsay evidence is inadmissible," he said. He looked at Helen, an expression half-challenging, half-apologetic on his face. Helen stared coldly back at him for some seconds, then a quizzical smile slowly appeared.

"All right," she said enigmatically.

The three went to Turnbull's room and very soon the lawyer was in possession of Helen's solution of the date riddle.

"That's most awfully interesting," he said. "I'm be-

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ginning to see light. Look here, can you get me a list of the *Snark's* cargoes on these trips?"

"The manifests? Yes, of course," said Helen. "Out or home?"

"Both, but particularly exports."

Tom whistled.

"I say, you don't mean . . . ?" he began.

"I mean to find out. Now, when can you let me have them?"

"By lunch time. Will that do?"

"Splendidly. Fairbanks, you might go and collect them. It isn't fair to ask Morden's clerks to trot about on our business—they must be short-handed as it is with your father running the business, Miss Mildmay."

"Oh, it doesn't make much difference. Father does much the same as he's always done."

"And you run the business?"

Helen laughed.

"Perhaps it runs itself. Still, Tom can come if he likes."

As soon as Helen had been escorted, in unnecessary strength, to the front door, Tom turned to Turnbull.

"I say," he began eagerly, "is it . . . ?"

"Not here, you ass. Come to my room if you want to ask questions."

"Is it smuggling?" asked Tom when it was safe to do so.

"Something like it, I should imagine. Rum-running



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is the fashionable name for it nowadays. But how Morden's been doing it—I don't know."

"Selling it to America, perhaps," suggested Tom, brightly.

"Yes, of course, but how? The *Snark* doesn't go to America. She may be carrying whisky to Kingston or Belize, but that would all have to be delivered into bond—that's not rum-running, and there's no fortune to be made out of it. Besides, Mordens are only the carriers—they aren't traders. Any profits there would be would go to the shippers. And again, any profits that came from the carrying of it would presumably be shown in the firm's books and wouldn't go straight into James Morden's pocket."

"But look here," said Tom. "Isn't it possible for the stuff to be transferred to another ship at sea? Isn't there a place outside territorial waters where the American wine merchants can take over whisky and wine?"

"Rum Row? Yes, I believe there is, though I doubt if they're called wine merchants. But the *Snark* can't be doing that—it would be bound to get out. Her crew are good-class sailors—they wouldn't all keep quiet about it. It takes a special picked crew of professional smugglers to run a game of that kind."

"Then how was it done?"

"That's just what I don't know. We must wait till we get these cargo manifests. And look here, I think it would be better if we both went round to Mordens' together and looked into them there. We may find

## EXPORT AND IMPORT

that there are other things we want to ask about."

Tom didn't much like this change of plan. He had had very few opportunities lately of seeing Helen, apart from Turnbull, and he was beginning to be jealous. Still, he had no valid objection to put forward. Soon after half-past two, therefore, the two found themselves in Charles Morden's room, together with Mr. Mildmay and his daughter. The manager attended to them himself, though Turnbull assured him that they did not wish to take up his valuable time. Mr. Mildmay, however, insisted on being present; possibly, for the nonce, he saw eye to eye with Tom in disliking the constant association of his daughter and the handsome young lawyer. Whatever his feelings, however, he took very little notice of Tom and was quietly deferential to Turnbull.

The papers for which Turnbull had asked were laid before him.

"Cargo out in this lot; cargo home in that."

Turnbull took the former bundle and turned to the list of goods carried by the *Snark* on her outward journey in February, 1924. It covered a very wide range—cotton goods, boots, agricultural implements, steel girders, proprietary brands of groceries—sugar, jam, pickles—general groceries, fancy goods. There appeared to be no wines or spirits. Turnbull frowned and turned to the next list—the outward journey in June, 1924. The list was a general one as before, but it contained an item that made his heart beat faster.

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Two hundred cases of whisky were consigned by Robertsons, the famous Scotch distillers, to a firm called Van Diemen and Hulz, of Kingston, Jamaica.

"Who are these people?" asked Turnbull.

"Van Diemen and Hulz? They're a large wholesale importing house—a very old-established firm."

"Have you carried much of Robertsons' stuff to them, do you know?"

"A certain amount, I think, Mr. Turnbull. Nothing out of the ordinary. You will see if you look at the other manifests. Allow me, sir. Nothing in the next one. Or the next. Here, in May '25, you see, there are a hundred cases of Robertsons. And here in the next one—August '25, there are seventy-five cases of 'Green Label'—McGlusky's that is. Here are a hundred and fifty more Robertsons in November, '25. And the same in August that year. Sixty of 'Green Label' at the same time. And I believe she's carrying some now—yes, here it is, fifty cases. Pretty regularly every other trip, you see, sir."

"But not a great deal?"

"No, not a great deal."

"What is that whisky worth?"

"Under bond? Round about forty-two shillings a case, I suppose, not counting freight."

"But that wouldn't go to you—that would go to Robertsons?"

"Oh, yes. All we get is the freight—six shillings a case."

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Turnbull frowned. He was silent for a while evidently thinking over what he had learnt.

"I suppose you would have receipts from Van Diemen for these consignments?" he asked at last.

"Oh, yes, certainly. Would you like to see them?"

"If I may."

"I'll get them, father," said Helen, and left the room.

"Do you carry whisky to any other importers?" asked Turnbull.

"Not much, I don't think, sir. A bit to Yarkers in Belize, perhaps. But Van Diemens are probably our biggest consignees. We carry more dry goods than anything else. Most of the whisky goes from the Clyde."

They went through the lists again in more detail, noting the amount of whisky carried. As Mr. Mildmay had said, Van Diemens were the biggest consignees and Robertsons the biggest exporters. Before the lists were finished Helen returned with the receipts, which were found to be all in order.

Turnbull felt that he had got no nearer the solution of the problem. He proposed that he should go back to his office to think things over and return later, but Mr. Mildmay put Charles Morden's room at his disposal and removed himself—and his daughter. As soon as the door was closed, Tom said:

"What about Mr. Charles Morden? Perhaps he could suggest something."

Turnbull shook his head.

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"It isn't likely. If he's not in it he won't know, and if he is he won't say—at least, I doubt if he will. In any case, I can't get anything out of him now. He seems to have chucked up altogether since Mrs. Morden let him down. He just sits on his bed and stares at the floor. He won't take any interest in his defence—except to say that he won't allow me to say anything about her. No, if his neck's to be saved we've got to save it without any help from him."

"What do we do next then?"

"Go through these papers again. I'll tackle the imports—it's just possible that we've been working at the wrong end. They may have been bringing in silk, or something, though that wouldn't explain the dol—I forgot, I mustn't tell you about that. You go through the exports again. We may have missed something. Make a note of all the firms and the different classes of goods carried on each trip."

For half an hour the two worked in silence. Then Tom uttered an exclamation.

"Here's something that may boil it down a bit. There's only a limited number of firms that have got goods on each list—each trip of the *Snark*, I mean. There are two big machinery firms—Hornston and Rusby, and Purchase. They're Cæsar's wives, aren't they?—we needn't bother about them. The same seems to apply to these two Manchester cotton goods firms—Stimsons and Eveleighs. But there are two local firms of general merchants that look more likely. Rattle-

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day and Rattleday—I seem to know them by name. Aren't they . . . ?”

“Huge business—been going for centuries,” interposed Turnbull. “Every other Lord Mayor of Liverpool's a Rattleday.”

“That only leaves Hallington, then. Do you know anything of him? He's had big consignments each time—and what's more, they're to Van Diemen and Hultz, these Kingston people that Robertsons' whisky goes to.”

“That sounds more like it,” said Turnbull. “I don't know the firm. Let's have old Mildmay in.”

Tom fetched the manager and Turnbull asked him about the firm of Hallington. Mr. Mildmay knew it well—a very reputable business—a privately-owned business—in a small way. Mordens had dealt with it for some years now. Such information as the manager had to give did not point to anything hopeful of results—such results as Turnbull required—but it was not conclusive in the opposite direction. The lawyer thanked Mr. Mildmay for his help and he and Tom took their leave. They had made a note of the address of Hallington's office in Burge Street, and made their way directly to it.

Hallington's might be all that Mildmay had said of it in the matter of respectability, but nobody could accuse its outside appearance of being pretentious. Burge Street was a small and rather obscure street off the Vauxhall Road. It seemed to consist largely of the

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backs of large warehouses, which probably fronted on to some more notable thoroughfare. The only outward sign of Hallington's was a small office, with the name of the firm inscribed in modest lettering upon the door. Next to the office, a pair of large gates suggested the presence of a yard within, but there was nothing to show whether they belonged to Hallington's or to some neighbour.

"This feels warm to me," whispered Turnbull, as he put his hand on the latch of the office door.

The office itself proved to be empty. It was as unpretentious as its exterior, a few dusty files on a shelf and a bundle of papers on a counter alone suggesting that business was transacted there. A bell stood on the counter and Turnbull struck it. The summons was answered promptly by a young, sturdy-looking man who entered by a door at the back, affording a fleeting glimpse of what appeared to be a large warehouse—and appeared, too, to be a more busy one than the office gave reason to expect. Quantities of packing cases could be seen and the sound of persistent hammering came more clearly through the open door. The impression, however, was only a momentary one, for the young man shut the door carefully behind him.

"Is Mr. Hallington in?" enquired Turnbull.

"Mr. Hallington does not live here, sir. He only comes in occasionally from Manchester."

"Oh, he's got another branch in Manchester, has he?"



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"I believe so."

"Can I see the manager, then?"

"That'll be my father. He's not by at the moment."

"That's a pity," said Turnbull, though he thought it might be an advantage. "Perhaps you could give me some information that I want. It's about a consignment of groceries that Mordens are carrying for you to Kingston. I come from Mordens, and I want . . ."

"Who might you be?" the young man interrupted him. "I've dealt with Mordens, but I've not seen you before."

Turnbull was slightly taken aback by this unexpected counter. He had not wished to divulge his identity but he saw that this young man was too shrewd to be bluffed.

"My name's Turnbull," he said. "I am Morden and Morden's solicitor."

The young man eyed him shrewdly.

"It'll be my father you want to see, sir," he said.

"He'll be back at half past four."

It was perfectly obvious from his expression that he meant what he said. Turnbull thanked him and turned to the door. Then a thought struck him.

"Was that Mr. Hallington I met just before I got here?" he asked. "A little fat, clean-shaven man with glasses."

"Oh, no," said the young man, taken off his guard. "Mr. Hallington's fairly tall, with a black moustache."

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

Outside, Turnbull turned to Tom, his eyes shining with eagerness.

"Always distrust a man with a black moustache," he said, "especially if he's got a red complexion."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MR. HALLINGTON'S BUSINESS

TOM FAIRBANKS stared at his companion.

"Where do you get the red complexion from?" he asked.

"From my great brain. It's only a shot, of course, but I believe it's right. It came to me all of a sudden."

"Shall we go and ask?"

"No, I don't want to put them on their guard more than they are at present—that young chap is pretty sharp. How much he knows I can't say, but I'll bet he knows there's something fishy."

"What'll you do then?"

"Think—if you'll only stop talking a minute."

They walked along for some time in silence. Suddenly Turnbull stopped.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I'll take a leaf out of Dodd's book. What was the name of that photographer?"

"What photographer?"

"Tell me the names of some prominent Liverpool photographers—quick."

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

"Floodyer? Van Tromp? Rait and Birkett?"

"That's it. Rait and Birkett. Look here, just slip back to the office and find out if anything urgent has come in. Tell them I'll look in before six. I've got a good bit to do and I must do it myself. Meet me at the end of Burge Street at half past four."

It was much nearer five before Turnbull appeared.

"Come on," he said, without apology or explanation.

They entered Hallington's office, but this time it was not empty. An elderly man, thin but tough-looking, was seated behind the counter, reading a paper. As he looked up at his visitors it became evident where the brains of the family came from. A shrewder and at the same time a more reliable man Turnbull thought he had never seen.

"Good evening," said the lawyer.

"Good even to ye."

"Are you the manager?"

"I am that."

"I understand that Mr. Hallington is not here?"

"Ye understand right."

"Your son told me, Mr. . . . ?"

"Figgs. Benjamin Figgs."

"You son told me that Mr. Hallington very seldom came in—that he lived in Manchester. Is that so?"

"What will ye be wanting, Mr. Turnbull?"

Turnbull scrutinized the shrewd face in front of him and came to a quick decision.

"I'll tell you exactly what I want, Mr. Figgs, and what I'm after. As your son probably told you, I am the solicitor employed by Morden and Morden. But at this moment I am engaged particularly in the defence of Mr. Charles Morden, who is accused of murdering his partner. I want some information from you that will, I believe, help me to clear my client."

Mr. Figgs made no comment. He gazed steadily at the lawyer's face.

"In the first place," went on Turnbull. "I want you to tell me who that is."

He drew from his pocket a photograph of a man of middle age, with black hair and a heavy black moustache, and put it on the counter before Mr. Figgs. The latter looked at it and Turnbull, watching him closely, thought he saw a flicker of recognition in his eyes. It was a fleeting impression; Mr. Figgs remained outwardly unmoved.

"Why would I know him?"

"You do know him?"

"I haven't said so."

"Very well, Mr. Figgs. Now, please look at this photograph." Turnbull produced a photograph that appeared to be exactly similar to the previous one, except that the black moustache was missing.

"That," he said impressively, "is a photograph of James Morden, who was murdered in the docks on the 31st of March."

There was no mistaking the effect upon Mr. Figgs

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

of this announcement. He literally gasped as he stared at the two photographs before him.

"But this," he stammered, pointing at the moustached face, "isn't this—isn't this Mr. Hallington?"

"That's just what I wanted you to tell me," said Turnbull, with an inward sigh of satisfaction.

"It's mighty like him," muttered Figs.

"There's no doubt that it is him," said Turnbull, "and that it's also James Morden. They're the same man."

"But where did ye get this picture of Hallington?"

"I had it made. Your son told me that Hallington had a black moustache. I got a photographer to draw a black moustache on to a photograph of Morden and then re-photograph it."

"How did you know the shape of the moustache?" asked Tom, who had been hardly less impressed than Figs.

"Well, that was rather bright. The photographer and I talked that over. We came to the conclusion that anyone who wanted to disguise himself wouldn't put on a small moustache, but a big one. A big one must be either brushed up or drooping. Big brushed up moustaches went out of fashion in 1914, so it had to droop. Q.E.F."

Mr. Figs looked crestfallen. He probably felt that he had been duped.

"And what of it?" he asked rather sourly. "What will ye want with me?"

Turnbull became grave again.

"What I'm going to ask you now is a serious matter. You can refuse to answer, of course. In that case I should have to sub-pœna you. But I strongly advise you to tell me everything that I ask you. A man has been murdered; there has been fraud on a large and serious scale. I don't say you know anything about the murder—I don't suppose you do—but if I'm right, you must know about the fraud. If you conceal facts now you place yourself in a much more serious position than you are already in, Mr. Figs."

Mr. Figs continued to look at him steadily.

"What do ye want to know?" he asked again.

"I want to know all the details of Hallington's business and of the cargoes that Morden and Morden have been carrying to Kingston."

Mr. Figs remained silent for a while, then:

"I'll be speakin' to my sons," he said.

He rose from his seat and without further notice of his visitors went out through the door which led into the warehouse. Minutes passed—ten, fifteen, twenty—and he did not return. Turnbull began to feel anxious, and to wonder whether he had been wise in letting him out of his sight. Just when he was contemplating the idea of following Figs into the warehouse, the door opened and the son appeared.

"Will you come this way, gentlemen," he said.

They followed him into, and through, the warehouse of which they had already had a glimpse. It was half



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full of packing cases, neatly arranged in various categories. Their guide did not pause, but led them through into another and smaller shed, also half full of packing cases, as well as of large heaps of straw and unpacked goods of various descriptions. A glance showed that two or three packing cases with open lids contained bottles in straw cases. At a small table, littered with papers, sat Mr. Figgs, apparently plunged in gloom. A young man, evidently another son, stood beside him and regarded the unwelcome visitors with a sullen scowl. Mr. Figgs rose and handed the only chair to Turnbull. The latter waved it away and sat down on a packing case.

"Your chair, Mr. Figgs," he said.

The manager sat down again.

"I've spoken with my sons," he said, "and we've decided to tell ye. We'd have ye believe that we didn't know that Mr. Hallington was James Morden—or that he was anyone but Hallington. We had no reason to doubt it."

He stopped and looked at Turnbull, as if requiring this statement to be accepted before proceeding. Turnbull nodded.

"I quite accept that," he said. "I never doubted it."

"I've been in the grocery business all my life," continued Mr. Figgs. "For twenty-odd years I ran a little shop here in Liverpool. Before the War things began to go hard with me—the big stores and Co-ops crowding out the little one-man businesses. I lasted through

## MR. HALLINGTON'S BUSINESS

the War somehow and, of course, did well in the boom. Then came the slump in '21 and knocked me right out. I had to sell up and, just as I was wondering where to turn, this Hallington came along with a proposition. I was slow to cotton to it, for I always thought it fishy, though it was straight enough on paper. To cut it short, he put me in here as manager of this exporting business. We were to export any kind of grocery and dry goods that we could market, but especially jams, and pickles. The jams and pickles all went to Jamaica—Van Diemen and Hulz, of Kingston."

"But why should Morden do this under an assumed name? There's nothing crooked so far."

"No, but like enough he knew there was going to be."

"I think it was to do *us* down," said the Revenue authority. "He wanted to avoid the higher rate of Super Tax—sliding scale, you know. Besides, if his profits in this business were under £2,000, he'd pay no Super Tax on it at all."

"Nor he would. That explains that. Go on, Mr. Figgs."

"Well, sir, the business went along nicely in a small way. Overhead charges were low—I worked it myself with one errand boy. I should say Hallington cleared £1,000 to £1,500 a year from it. But it didn't seem to satisfy him. At the end of '23 he came to me with a new proposition. I was to have double salary and a commission. My wife was sick and my daughters wanted schooling, so I agreed—the more fool me, it

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seems. We were to buy whisky from the big distillers—Robertsons, Murrays, 'Green Label,' and others, and repack it in specially-made bottles as jams and pickles. It would go, of course, in the regular jam and pickle cases that we'd been sending out for the last eighteen months—and that everyone had got accustomed to. That meant a lot of work—and risk. My two boys were growing up then, so I sacked the hired boy and took them on—I could trust them to keep their mouths shut—one as a whole-timer, the other in his spare time—he drives a lorry for Caytons, and he drives a light van for me. We deliver ourselves direct to the *Snark*—it was all to go by that boat—and Captain Keeling always saw it stored himself—he let us know when to deliver it. What Van Diemens did with it I don't know, but, of course, it didn't, in that form, have to go into bond; they probably shipped it straight across to some boot-legger in America—that was their job. Of course, they paid us for groceries and as groceries it's on our books, but I fancy Captain Keeling used to bring back the real money and deliver it direct to Hallington—it never went into our books."

"Keeling!" said Turnbull. "Keeling was in it up to the neck, of course."

"I'd say so."

Turnbull remained silent for a minute, evidently lost in thought.

"Look here, Mr. Figgs," he said at last. "I don't quite follow this. You say you bought your whisky

direct from the distillers—Robertsons, and so on—and that you took delivery of it here. That means that it had to come out of bond and you had to pay duty on it?”

“That’s so, sir.”

“But then, where does the profit come in? Either to you or to the consignees in Jamaica—Van Diemen or whatever their name is? Surely they could have got it cheaper by importing it direct under bond? The duty in Jamaica isn’t as high as the English duty, is it?”

“No, sir, it’s not—ye’re right there. The duty in Jamaica is 24s. 9d. per proof gallon—that means about 10s. a bottle retail as against our 12s. 6d. No, ye’ve put your finger on the crux all right there. I shall have to tell ye something about the American spirit market.”

“I’m afraid you will,” said Turnbull, “but make it as untechnical as you can—I don’t know the first thing about it.”

“I’ll try, sir. Directly the Yankee government put on prohibition, every smart jerk on both sides of the Atlantic started in to run spirits—and wine, too, of course—into the States, and sell it when they got it there. At first it was simple enough—the prohibition officers or whatever they are called—were new to the game, and not too keen about it—the whole thing was run in a very slack way. Then some new boss got control and he very quickly altered the outlook. All the easy ways of running the stuff were blocked at once and

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hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth were collared; it meant ruin to a lot of these fellows—and gaol for a good few. For some time there was only one sound way of getting good Scotch or Irish into the States and that was to ship it under bond to some firm in Hamburg; they transhipped it there into rum-running schooners, who got it somehow through the blockade and into the States."

"But why to Hamburg?" said Turnbull. "Why was it easier to tranship the stuff in German rather than in British ports?"

"Because the British Government have got an agreement with the U.S. to help stop the rum traffic. But if the shipment is apparently to a wet port—such as Hamburg—the British Customs aren't interested. But the German Government haven't—or hadn't—got this agreement with U.S.—they winked at the traffic—it helped German trade recovery."

"That's where our reparations come from, I suppose," said Tom.

"Not now, sir. That route's been blocked these last two or three years. I don't know whether the States got the Germans to fall in line or whether they just collared all the rum-runners. All I know is that for the best part of a year no British whisky was getting through."

"Phew! That must have hit some of the Four Hundred pretty hard."

"It did that, and that's where we come in. We cater

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for the rich folk who must have their Scotch, whatever it costs them. During that year they had to put up with any hell-fire moon-raking stuff they could get hold of. Some of them got used to it, but a lot were left who didn't and they'll pay super-champagne prices for good Scotch."

"I quite see that, but how does this re-packing business help?"

"Simply because Van Diemen couldn't any longer run the stuff that they bought openly under bond. The U.S. people had their eye on all the Kingston importers. They knew exactly how much whisky Van Diemen imported, and how much he retailed, and if it didn't tally they'd know at once that he was running stuff and wouldn't take their eyes off him till they found out how. So Van D. simply had to get the stuff in some form that the U.S. didn't stop. That's where we come in; we send it to them as jam and pickles."

"My word, that's pretty cute—now one knows the difficulties. But what about price? If you pay duty in England you've got to get a pretty high price from Van Diemen to make it worth your while."

"We do. It costs 131s. 6d. a case (buying one hundred cases or more at a time). They pay us 174s. We average the like of five hundred cases a trip—that means over £1,000 profit a time—and we've done three trips a year—£3,000 per annum."

"After paying duty! It's terrific. What must the poor American millionaire pay for his drink?"



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"I can't tell you that, sir, because I don't know how Van Diemen gets his stuff into the States or what it costs him to do it. Those figures mean that it reaches Van Diemen at 14s. 6d. a bottle, but it's the other side that the big costs begin—the professionals over there simply swallow dollars, I'm told—and then there'll likely be bribes and blackmail to be covered. I've heard Mr. Hallington say that the stuff wouldn't reach the consumer at less than £2 a bottle, and possibly nearer £3."

"My hat," said Tom, "thank goodness I'm a teetotaler—and British."

"I don't know that I can grasp it all just at once," said Turnbull. "I'll have to think it over. Somehow it seems too easy."

Figgs gave a dry laugh.

"It is—in theory; it takes some doing in practice. And I reckon it took some thinking out."

"But how about your books this end?" enquired Tom. "You show the jam and pickles as being sold to Van Diemen, of course. But what became of it really, and how did you show the whisky on your books? You'd be bound to show it coming in, because of your payments to Robertsons, etc. How did you show it as going out?"

"The jam and pickles I disposed of on the quiet—in the poorer districts where they don't mind how they buy it. We sold at a small loss because we had to take what we could get for it. The whisky we sold—on



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paper—to fictitious customers all over England—faked accounts made out to them, and so on.”

Turnbull laughed.

“That’s one in the eye for your department, Fairbanks,” he said.

“Yes, but how . . .” began Tom, then checked himself. “What profit have you been returning for income tax purposes, Mr. Figgs?” he added.

“I couldn’t tell ye that, sir. Accounts aren’t my department.”

“But the business would be making over £1,000 a year, apart from this whisky trade, I suppose?”

“I think it has.”

“Must have—probably nearer £2,000—but not quite. And you don’t know whether the Inspector of Taxes has called for an auditor’s statement?”

Benjamin Figgs looked at him shrewdly. Then:

“Accounts aren’t my department, sir. Mr. Hallington attended to them.”

“Of course,” said Turnbull. “Now tell me, Mr. Figgs, have your last two shipments of whisky—November and March—no, that won’t do, that’s the payments. Your shipments in August and December, roughly, it would be—have they been bigger than usual?”

“They were that. And the last was the biggest of the lot. Eight hundred dozen are in the *Snark* now—it’ll bring in a nice bit of money,” Mr. Figgs finished, with a sigh.

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"It will, but whom to—now Morden's dead?"

"Why, Keeling gets the money!" exclaimed Tom, "and he'll probably keep it. That's why—by Jove, he . . ." He stopped abruptly as a vicious heel came down on his toe.

"Well, Mr. Figgs," said Turnbull, blandly, "I'm obliged to you for telling me all this—and I think you were wise to tell it. I don't see how we can keep it quiet—we can't be 'accessories after'—but as it comes more or less in the form of 'King's Evidence,' the authorities may pass it over lightly. Meantime, don't talk. I may have to ask you some more questions; if I do, I'll come back. Good evening."

"Good even to ye, sir."

"That's a very pretty little story," said Turnbull, when they were outside. "Master James was a sly fox, if ever there was one. And there are no flies on Figgs. A fool would have bluffed and got landed badly."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Tom. "Tell the police? Keeling must have killed Morden."

"I think he did. But how are we to prove it? There's the motive all right now, but when did he do it? I doubt if we shall shake old Potts' evidence, and he's got a reputation. Of course, Keeling may have slipped over somewhere—come in through the dock gates by boat, perhaps—but we shall have to prove that."

"But are we sure Morden was killed that night? There's the blood, of course, but that may have been a

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fake. Mayn't he have killed him when he came back the next night?"

"Ah, if we could prove that that was a fake—proof again, you see—we should have nearly done our job. No, I don't think I shall tell the police about this yet. I want to get at Keeling myself when he comes back to give evidence at the adjourned inquest. And that reminds me—when *is* he coming back? They're a devilish long time in getting hold of him."

"Shall I go and ask if they've got any news?"

"They wouldn't tell you, my lad. You're not Dodd's favourite flower. But they might tell me. Come on, we can't do any harm by asking that and we may find out how the land lies."

They walked along for some time in silence, each thinking over the details of the extraordinary story that he had just heard. Tom was the first to break the silence.

"I say, Mr. Turnbull," he said. "I don't think I can swallow that bit about the faked accounts—for the whisky that was supposed to be sold in England, I mean. Our people would have been bound to spot that. You see, Hallington would make his return, for Income Tax purposes, on Form Nine, in the ordinary way. Say he showed a profit of about £1,000 to £1,500. The Inspector might accept that once, or perhaps twice or three times, if he had no reason to doubt it. But after that he would certainly want details—to satisfy himself that the profit was being prop-

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erly stated. He would call for a statement vouched for by properly accredited auditors. Hallington would have to put all his books, including pass-books, before the auditor and he'd spot at once that these sales were fakes. You see, the pass-books would have to show payments from these fictitious customers—and how could that be done?"

"I don't know," said Turnbull. "I'm not satisfied myself. For one thing I don't believe the profit he says Morden was making was big enough to repay the risk. It would boil down to a good deal less than £3,000 a year when all expenses were paid and everybody had had his share. I'm going to look into this."

"There's another point," said Tom. "Morden must have had another account in the name of Hallington besides his own ordinary private one here, and his second account in his own name in Manchester. You see, all his ordinary trading as Hallington would have required an account in the name of Hallington. His customers would have drawn their cheques to Hallington, and he'd have had to pay for his purchases as Hallington."

"That's so. Still, that would be quite separate from the special payments in dollars for the whisky—over and above 'pickle prices.' We shall be able to trace that Hallington account easily enough, but I don't suppose we shall get much out of it."

It was long past office hours when they got to police-headquarters. But Dodd, whatever his failings, was a worker and he was still at work. He greeted his two

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visitors more agreeably than was his usual practice.

"Well, Mr. Turnbull," he said. "I don't think our little business'll keep us much longer now."

"I'm glad to hear it. I came to ask when you were going to hold the adjourned inquest. My client's been in custody long enough."

"He won't have to complain of that much longer. His complaint'll be the other way, I reckon," said Dodd, with a coarse chuckle.

Turnbull bottled up the disgust he felt.

"Have you got your two sailor witnesses, then?" he asked.

"I can't say I've got them, but I know where they are. And it'll surprise you. It may be difficult to get 'em here, but, at least, I can get their evidence on an affidavit."

"Why can't you get them here?"

"Because they're in gaol!"

"In gaol! Where? Why?"

"In America. The *Snark* was arrested in Rum Row by the Prohibition officers last week!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE GREEN TICKET

"I'M sorry to disappoint you, Superintendent," said Turnbull, "but your news doesn't surprise me as much as it deserves to."

"Doesn't surprise you?"

"No. I knew Keeling was running whisky."

"Then why in hell didn't you tell me?"

The lawyer might have said that it was none of his business to prompt the prosecution, but he believed in keeping on good terms with the police if possible.

"I was just going to," he lied blandly. "I only found it out myself half an hour ago."

"What have you found out?"

Turnbull told him briefly the result of his investigations at Hallington's. He did not think it necessary to say how his attention had been attracted in that direction, nor did he betray the bank's secrets.

"So you see," he concluded, "our suspicions about Keeling are stronger than ever. We've got a first-class motive, though at the moment, our 'opportunity' is uncertain. You've got the 'opportunity,' but no motive."

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"Oh, haven't I?" said Dodd grimly. "You'll make a big mistake if you count on that."

"What is it?" asked Turnbull, confidently. He had as yet said nothing to the police about Charles Morden's passion for his partner's wife—the only possible motive, in his eyes.

"Well, Mr. Turnbull, you've played square with me so far, so I'll give you a hint. Run your eye through old Charles Morden's will."

"Old Charles's will? What about it?"

"Read it and see. You're his solicitor, aren't you? You've got a copy. I had to get mine from Somerset House."

Turnbull felt rather crestfallen at being "put wise" on a point in his own special province. He thanked the Superintendent for the hint and, having made some further enquiries about the adjourned inquest, he prepared to take his leave when Tom Fairbanks whispered something in his ear. Turnbull nodded.

"Any objection, Superintendent, to our seeing the exhibits you took from Morden's body?" he asked.

"None at all, if you think they'll help you. I'll show them to you."

He led the way to a room in the basement and, unlocking a cupboard, drew out a tray-shelf. On the tray were a neatly-folded suit of clothes, a pair of shoes and socks, two handkerchiefs, a shirt and under-clothing, a collar and tie, a pocket-book, a bunch of keys, some sheets of paper that appeared once to have been letters,



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a faded green ticket, some silver and coppers, a pen-knife, a cigarette-holder, and a gold pencil. The Superintendent took up the jacket and shook it out; the material was so stained and faded that it was impossible to say what colour it had been.

"There you are," said Dodd. "Recognize it?"

"No, but I recognize that pencil-case. It belonged to his father, I believe."

"Recognize anything else? The cigarette-holder or the knife or the pocket-book?"

"No. I can't say I do. What about the shirt and underclothing; are they marked?"

The Superintendent showed him the faint but distinct name tabs sewn into the garments referred to.

"What about the letters—anything to be made of them?"

"No, there's not a trace of writing left. We've tried every known test. Nor on the ticket. The notes in that case are still fairly distinct—the leather protected them."

"Been able to trace them?"

"They're only treasury notes—not Bank of England. Otherwise it would have been easy."

"What about the shoes? I see they're falling to pieces. Were they on his feet?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Oh, I just asked. They might have—but it doesn't matter."

"Isn't it rather odd that Mr. Morden should have a

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bus ticket?" asked Tom. "I shouldn't have thought he was the sort of person who ever went in a bus."

"I don't know that he did, now that you mention it. What about it, Superintendent? Have you traced it?"

"Can't say I have. It didn't seem very important. Besides, it's undecipherable, as you can see."

Turnbull picked it up. It was, as has been said, of a faded green colour. There was a punch hole near one end. All the print had been washed off it, with the exception of a faint "F" which appeared at one end—evidently the top.

"D'you know what bus company it belongs to? Or is it a tram ticket?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," said the Superintendent, who was evidently bored with the subject.

"Could I take it and try and trace it?" asked Tom, who probably felt that it was time he swam into the lime-light again; Turnbull had scored too heavily over the Hallington business.

"No, you couldn't," replied the Superintendent bluntly. "It's an exhibit, and may be wanted in court."

"Well, I suppose I can measure it then," said Tom, who was not easily snubbed off something he wanted. He took a piece of paper from his pocket, marked off the outline of the ticket and the position of the punch-hole and the letter "F." Then he laid the ticket back on the tray.

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"Let me know when you've found the murderer," said Dodd, in his pleasant way.

"I will. You'll have to finish the job off after I've caught him," replied Tom, blandly.

Having said good-night to the Superintendent and thanked him for his help, Turnbull preceded Tom out into the street.

"Don't cheek the police, young man," he said, when they were out of earshot. "You never know when you may want their help. I'm sorry; that's what's called 'sententiously,' isn't it? But it's sense, too."

"I'm sure it's sense, but that fellow's such a vulgar cad. I'm going to try the ticket line—I don't believe Morden ever bought it. It's too late to-night, I suppose, but if you don't want me, I shall try first thing to-morrow."

At nine o'clock on the following morning Tom walked into the central office of the "General Omnibus Company." He showed a well-made and coloured facsimile of the ticket to a clerk, and was at once told that it was smaller than any used by the G.O.C. It was also smaller than any tram ticket. He was advised to try the "National," the "North Liverpool and Local," or the "Blue Bird" companies. The "National" assured him that they used no green tickets, but the "North Liverpool Company" not only used them but used them in the precise size tendered by Tom.

"I suppose it wouldn't be possible to trace this ticket?" enquired Tom.

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"Hardly likely, but it's not impossible," replied the clerk whom he was interrogating. "The green's a nine-penny ticket; it only operates on three routes—Wigan and the two Southport routes. That letter 'F' fines it down to the Formby-Southport route. There's no difficulty about that. But you don't know what part of the route it covers—the full distance is eighteenpence. And what's worse, there's nothing to show the date. Or do you know that?"

"Not exactly, but probably about the 31st of March."

"Oh, Lord," said the clerk, "that's a long way back. The conductor would never remember that. Stop a minute, though. The 31st of March, did you say? Well, I can tell you it wasn't that day, anyhow."

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Because that route didn't open till the 1st of April. Alt Bridge was under repair; so we closed the route, and passengers to Southport had to go by Ormskirk. 'F' route didn't re-open till the 1st of April."

"Then—then—a chap couldn't have had this ticket in his pocket on the 31st of March?" stammered Tom.

"Certainly he couldn't."

Tom stared at him with open mouth, then, with a yell, turned on his heel and dashed wildly out of the office. The clerk looked after him in wonderment.

"Potty, poor kipper," was his comment.

Spreading consternation, if not actual destruction, along his path, Tom flew through the streets of Liverpool to the office of Turnbull, Vent and Turnbull.

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Without waiting to enquire whether Mr. William Turnbull was engaged, he dashed into the latter's room, just as that learned gentleman was assuring the Dowager Lady Everton that it would be quite safe for her to bequeath a year's wages to her life-long personal attendant without unduly prejudicing the inheritance of young Lord Everton and the Honourable Gweneth Bootle.

"I've done—I've done . . . Oh, Lord!" Tom pulled up with a jerk and stood gazing stupidly at the ferocious face of his employer.

"Oh, Lady; you mean," said the Dowager, complacently. "The young man seems excited about something, Mr. Turnbull. Is he a partner or a client?"

"I deeply apologize, Lady Everton. My clerk has been engaged on some trying work. His mind . . . Get out, you young fool!"

"No, no, don't get out. I think he's enchanting. Excitement is so rare nowadays, Mr. Turnbull; everybody is so cold-blooded. What have you done, young man; killed your grandmother and want a holiday?"

Tom had by this time recovered his balance, but he was still too excited to be shy.

"No, madam, but I've solved a problem we've been working on for weeks and I—I think I've saved a man's life."

"Well, that's not a bad start for the day's work. Perhaps I'd better go—perhaps he'll start dying again if I keep you waiting. I shan't be dying myself just

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yet, Mr. Turnbull, so we can leave my little business till another day."

As she went out she tapped Tom on the arm.

"You must come and tell me about it some day, young man," she said. "I'm old enough to like being thrilled."

When the door had closed behind her Turnbull turned towards the delinquent.

"Damned lucky for you she took it like that," he said. "She's my best client and if you'd lost her for me you'd have felt it as hardly as I should—and in a different place. What's it all about?"

Tom told him of his great discovery, and Turnbull's anger soon vanished.

"Do you mean to say that these bus people can swear that that ticket was not issued till after the 31st of March—till after the night of the supposed murder—after Charles Morden had started for Fishguard?"

"So they say."

"But that clears us absolutely! By Gad, that's a great scoop, Tom—I must call you Tom, after that, and I apologize for losing my temper."

Tom bowed his acknowledgments.

"I don't think we can let poor Morden languish in prison any longer after this," continued Turnbull. "If this evidence stands, the police can't possibly hold him. I'll go round to this bus office and then see the Chief Constable. And you, my boy, may have the morning off, with leave to convey this startling information to

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Miss Helen Mildmay and to make yourself as glorious as possible in her lovely eyes."

Tom did not quite like the slightly patronizing air with which this favour was granted, but that did not prevent him from accepting it. He went to the office of Morden and Morden, extracted Helen from it on the plea of urgent business, and eventually was privileged to give her lunch. Helen reacted admirably to the stimulus of Tom's great discovery and before the meal was over the latter felt that he had made such headway that his friendly rival—as he regarded Turnbull—would have to pull out some really startling performance to get his nose—handsome as it was—in front again.

In the meantime Turnbull had sought and obtained an interview with the Chief Constable. Major Waring greeted him sympathetically and at once apologized for the delay in holding the adjourned inquest. When he heard that the solicitor had come to apply, on the grounds of fresh evidence, for the release of the accused man, he asked him to wait until the detective-superintendent in charge of the case could be fetched and given an opportunity to meet the application. Turnbull could not possibly object to this, much as he would have preferred the absence of the unsympathetic and cynical Dodd. In a few minutes the latter appeared and Turnbull at once stated the grounds for his application.

"So you see," he said, when he had finished, "James Morden was still alive when Charles was in the train,



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and possibly even the boat for Ireland and America."

The Chief Constable received this startling development calmly, but Superintendent Dodd was palpably disturbed. He became red in the face—redder, that is to say, than usual—and his small eyes seemed to sink deeper into his fleshy cheeks. He breathed loudly, but did not speak.

"Well, Dodd," said the Chief Constable, "what about it? How did you come to miss that?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir," replied the detective, darting an angry look at the solicitor who had brought upon him this implied reprimand. "The ticket was quite washed out and it didn't seem important."

Major Waring did not pursue the matter—at the moment. He turned to his other point.

"What about Mr. Morden? Can we still hold him in face of this evidence—assuming, of course, that it is verified?"

The detective remained silent for a while, a frown upon his face. His breathing became, if possible, more stertorous than before. Suddenly, however, his expression cleared and a triumphant chuckle rolled up from the depths.

"That's all right, sir," he said. "Charles Morden got to Queenstown on Friday night. There was nothing to stop him catching a boat back from Queenstown to Liverpool on Saturday morning, killing James on Saturday night, and getting back to Queenstown again on Sunday or Monday. He didn't sail from Queenstown on

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the *Bremen* till Tuesday. We ought to be able to trace him all right."

He gazed in triumph at Turnbull, clearly indicating what he would have said had he not been in the presence of superior authority. Waring, too, looked at the solicitor interrogatively. The latter was slightly dashed, but not defeated.

"But where did he kill him? And how? And why? Why should he have come all the way back from Queenstown to kill him when he could have killed him here?"

"Because he thought he had established an alibi that way. And he had as far as you were concerned," added Dodd, with a sneer.

"But what about the blood on the quay? You practically proved that that was James Morden's. That *must* mean conspiracy, as I've said all along."

The Chief Constable raised his eyebrows.

"Conspiracy?" he said. "What do you mean?"

Turnbull realized that he was not in a position to expose the whole of his case. Charles Morden had not yet given him leave to divulge the secret of his escapade with Lilith. He therefore referred, in answer to the Chief Constable, only to the idea that James Morden had intended to leave the country, probably in connection with his rum-running transactions, which, of course, the Chief Constable now knew about. Finally, he expressed his belief that Captain Keeling was a much more likely object of suspicion than Charles Morden,

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especially now that a later time for the murder was indicated.

"Surely," he said, "it's obvious that Keeling came back, met Morden somewhere—at some pre-arranged spot—probably with the intention of taking him off in the *Snark*. Don't you see that your watching and searching the *Snark* made it impossible to take him on board then? No doubt that's why Keeling turned up at the last moment with that woman; he had to provide a plausible explanation for the empty cabin. He came back to fetch Morden, quarrelled with him, and killed him. It's as plain as a pikestaff."

"It may be, Mr. Turnbull," said Dodd. "But you've missed one little point that makes a great deal of difference."

"What point?"

"Ah," replied the detective. "I think I'll just keep that to myself for a bit."

Turnbull turned to the Chief Constable.

"You won't release Charles Morden?" he said.

Waring shook his head.

"I'm afraid we can't—at any rate till we've tested Dodd's theory of the return from Queenstown."

"Then for God's sake get this man Keeling back from America and let me cross-examine him. It's damnable keeping a man shut up all this time without trial!" exclaimed Turnbull angrily. "Especially when it's perfectly obvious to anyone but an obstinate fool that he's innocent."

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The Chief Constable took no notice of Turnbull's not unnatural heat.

"We'll get him back for you as quick as we can," he said. "It's a little difficult now he's in gaol over there, but I've been in touch with them about it. They may send him over in custody."

There was a knock at the door, and Inspector Vernon came in, carrying a cablegram.

"I thought you'd want to see this at once, sir," he said.

The Chief Constable took the cablegram and read it. He uttered an ejaculation of surprise.

"Good God!" he said. "They've let the man escape! They were taking Keeling and two other rum-runners across from gaol to the Court House when the escort was attacked by a gang of boot-leggers. Two police and two gangsters and a prisoner were killed, but Keeling and the other man got away!"

## CHAPTER XX

### HELEN TAKES ACTION

"WELL, Dodd. What do you make of it?" asked the Chief Constable when Turnbull had left.

The detective still appeared to be not a little ruffled by the two new developments—the bus-ticket and the escape of Keeling—notwithstanding the fact that he had made a show of discounting the importance of the former.

"About Keeling's escape, sir? It's tiresome, of course, but . . ."

"About this bus ticket," interrupted the Chief Constable quietly. "We ought not to have missed that point."

"Well, sir. I don't know that it's of much importance. It seems to me quite possible, as I said, that Charles Morden came back from Queenstown and killed his partner on the Saturday night."

"It's of the very greatest importance, Superintendent, and we shan't make it any better by trying to slur it over." The Chief Constable was not a man who lightly apportioned either blame or praise. His words now were mild enough, but the tone in which

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they were spoken left Superintendent Dodd in no doubt as to the advisability of further argument.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said. "I should have looked into it. I felt so sure that the question of time was settled. There may be a hole in it yet, of course, though I don't see how we are to get round the closing of that bus route."

"What about the other alternative? Could that ticket have been put into Morden's pocket after he was dead?"

"With the idea of faking an alibi, sir?"

"Something of the kind, perhaps. What time was the body found?"

"About 8 a.m. on the 5th, sir."

"No indication of how long it had been there, I suppose?"

"Well, sir, the tide should show that. It was high soon after 2 a.m. that morning, so I take it the body had been there about six hours—it isn't likely that it could have been there more than one flow. It's a fairly deserted spot, but there's generally somebody goes by in a twenty-four hours. And, of course, Vernon was by there the morning before. Still, it's just possible that someone might have slipped it in."

"If they knew the body was going to be there. But how could they? Nobody could have counted on the tide washing it up at that time and that place."

Dodd opened his mouth as if to speak, but evidently changed his mind and remained silent.

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"About Charles Morden's alibi—if this bus ticket clue is correct—you'll look into that at Cork and Queenstown, I suppose?" The detective nodded. "The Keeling business is out of our hands now. The American police will do their best to get him back for their own sakes. But we may not be able to wait for that. There's a good deal in what Mr. Turnbull said. We've kept Charles Morden on remand long enough. Get through to New York and see if there's any chance of their releasing the mate to us. If not, we must rely on their signed statements for the hearing by the magistrates and trust to getting Keeling or the mate back in time for the Assizes—always assuming that the magistrates commit; they won't, unless you can prove your Saturday night theory. Three or four days should be enough to clear that point up, I take it? Very well, we'd better arrange a resumed hearing on Monday next."

"Very good, sir."

"What do you think of Mr. Turnbull's Keeling theory yourself, Dodd? At first glance, it looks plausible."

"It does that, sir," admitted the detective, with evident reluctance. "But I don't think he did it, even if Charles Morden didn't."

"Why don't you think so?"

Superintendent Dodd remained silent for half a minute, evidently contemplating his answer.

"I think I'd rather not answer that just yet, sir, if



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you'll excuse me," he said at last. Major Waring nodded.

"All right, Dodd," he said. "I won't press you. But we must get down to this now; it's hung fire too long."

He nodded in dismissal, and turned to his papers.

The detective, however, lingered.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but should I do anything about this Hallington business?"

"What Hallington business?"

"This other business of James Morden's, sir. Mr. Turnbull dug it up. He told me all about it, but I don't think you've had it all. It's at the bottom of this whisky-running that Keeling and the *Snark* were nabbed for."

Dodd recounted to the Chief Constable the details of the Hallington business, so far as he remembered them.

"You see, sir," he said, when he had finished, "I don't know that it's exactly our job. It supports Mr. Turnbull's theory rather than ours. And I'm not quite clear what law was broken. Apparently, they paid duty on the whisky all right—only they repacked it so as to slide through the American prohibition people. Is that our worry, sir?"

"Better hand that side of it over to the Customs people, Dodd. We've got an agreement of some kind with the States, I fancy—they'll know all about that. But you'd better go into it yourself, too, if you've time. It's our job to find out the truth, even if it doesn't suit

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our present theories. Let me know what you find."

He nodded again, and this time Dodd took the hint.

In the meantime Turnbull had made his way to the gaol and obtained permission to visit his client. He found Charles Morden, as usual, sunk in gloom. The man seemed quite unable to pull himself together after the shock of his lover's treachery. He still appeared to regard her as a lover, though Turnbull felt pretty sure that Lilith had never cared two straws for a man whom she had used as a mere tool—though as a tool for what he was still uncertain. The lawyer could not help feeling a certain contempt for what he regarded as a rather abject performance; he himself would very quickly have thrown off any feeling of love for a woman who had treated him so vilely—but then he secretly felt that no woman would have behaved like that to William Turnbull.

On this occasion he felt that the startling news he brought must stir Charles Morden into some show of interest, and he was not wrong. Morden listened at first apathetically, but the story of the whisky-smuggling evidently touched a professional nerve and he soon pricked up his ears and began to question the lawyer as to the details of his cousin's scheme. He was unable, however, to pick any hole in it, or in the theory put forward by Turnbull.

"This astounds me," said Morden, when they had been through the whole story at least two and a half times. "I didn't know James had got the brains to

work out such a scheme, though he certainly had the nerve to. It beats me, though, that none of us found it out."

"I don't see how you could," said Turnbull, "unless it was by accident on the *Snark*. Everything that went through your office was perfectly normal."

"I suppose it was. Anyhow, it explains where James got his money from. I used to wonder how he kept it up in the way he did; it was all I could do as a bachelor—and a pretty quiet one at that—to put by a few hundred a year."

"It does explain it. The trouble is that the police don't think it explains the murder. That thick-headed fool Dodd still thinks you did it. He swears that, even if you didn't kill James before you left Liverpool on the 31st of March, you had plenty of time to come back by sea from Queenstown and kill him about the 2nd of April. You see, you didn't sail from Queenstown to New York till the 5th. Can you account for all your time in between?"

"I should think so. Not the day-time, perhaps, because I used to moon about a good deal—by myself, of course. But I always slept in the same hotel. (I stayed at Cork, of course—it's only a few minutes from Queenstown, and there's nothing much there.) One ought to be able to prove that. But would they remember it, though? It's weeks ago now; how can a maid remember if I was in my room on any special morning all that time ago? Sometimes I got up before

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I was called and went out for a walk—I couldn't sleep. And I didn't always have breakfast in the hotel. It isn't going to be so easy as it sounds, Turnbull."

"Oh, I expect it will be all right. You give me all the details you can and I'll send someone over there to get them verified."

"Yes, but look here, why am I supposed to have killed James? I've never been able to understand that."

"Nor did I till yesterday. Then Dodd gave me a hint and I looked up your father's—your adopted father's—will. James Morden had only a life interest in the business; on his death the whole thing goes to you absolutely. Did you know that?"

"Good Lord, no! I hadn't an idea of it. But what had it got to do with my father—with old Charles? Surely James inherited his father's share?"

"No, he didn't. Old Charles bought his brother out and was only paying him a salary, or an allowance, or whatever you like to call it, for the last few years of his life. Now that James is dead, you're sole owner. There's your motive, I'm afraid."

"Hell! Why didn't I know that? Why didn't someone tell me?"

"I ought to have known, of course," said the lawyer. "But old Charles's will was stale bread when I took over your affairs. I ought to have read up the whole story, of course, but somehow one doesn't do half the things one ought to do—if one's busy, as I have been. It's pretty awkward and I'm frightfully sorry."

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"But Lilith? What does she get? I thought James's share would go to her. What will she have to live on now?"

"There's a small life insurance—about £150 a year, I think—not much use to a woman accustomed to luxury. Apart from that there's only what she's got herself, or what they've saved—and I shouldn't think that was much."

"She's got nothing of her own; not a bean. And I don't believe they've saved a penny."

"Her people . . . ?"

"Her father crashed long ago; they can't do anything for her, and they wouldn't if they could—they're a rotten lot."

Turnbull thought that, from the specimen he knew, he could well believe it, but he refrained from saying so. Charles Morden remained sunk in thought for some minutes. At last he looked up.

"She's got to have James's share," he said. "You must work it somehow."

Turnbull stared.

"Do you mean to say you want to give it her?" he exclaimed.

Charles nodded.

"After the way she's treated you?"

"Of course, I do," said Charles, hotly. "I love her. You can't expect me to stand by and see her starve, can you?"

"Well, I'm damned! Of all the Quixotic idiots!"

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said Turnbull—but he said it to himself. All he said to his client was:

“Won’t you let me tell the Chief Constable about what happened. I believe . . .”

“Certainly, I won’t—I told you that before,” replied Charles, shortly.

“Yet, but look here, things have changed a bit. Very likely Dodd thinks that you were in this smuggling business with James and that you both were doing a bolt—and that you killed James to get the whole of the profits instead of only your share. There’s another motive, don’t you see, and a still stronger one. If you’ll only let me tell them—and prove to them—why you really went away, I feel pretty sure that they’ll have to release you.”

“Well, I’ll stay in gaol then. I’m not going to save my skin by tarring Lilith. You must get me off somehow else—prove that Keeling did it, or something. And don’t ask me about it again; I shan’t change my mind.”

Turnbull looked at him with dawning, though reluctant, admiration.

“And you want to make over to her her husband’s share in the business?”

“I do. And if she won’t take it as a gift I’ll marry her, if she’ll have me.”

“My God!” said Turnbull, aloud this time. “You are a white man.”

The morning had been a long one and it was past two before Turnbull got any lunch, but he hurried

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through the meal and directly afterwards sent for his two partners—not the dead Turnbull and the moribund Vent, but his unofficial partners in this affair, Tom Fairbanks and Helen Mildmay—and discussed with them the new developments of the previous day, including the Quixotic obstinacy of their client.

"It's a case of so near and yet so far," he said. "I've not the least doubt in my own mind about the whole thing, and I don't suppose you have, but we can't prove it yet. It may be quite difficult to account for Charles's time in Queenstown and Cork, and there's no doubt now that the police have got a good motive against him. If only he'd let me tell them about that rotten woman—or if the Yanks hadn't let Keeling escape!"

Tom Fairbanks nodded.

"That's the crux," he said, and relapsed into profound thought.

"It's so difficult to know what we can do next," went on the lawyer. "Of course, we can investigate Queens-town—I think you'll have to do that, Tom—but it's no good worrying Charles any more about his Lilith—he's as obstinate as a pig; and I don't trust the American police—one hears these stories about graft. Supposing someone had been bribed to let Keeling escape?"

Tom's "profound thought" having now lasted for nearly three minutes, he emerged from it with his mind evidently fully made up. He rose to his feet.

"I'm going to America," he said dramatically.

Turnbull stared at him.



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"It's the only way," went on Tom, with unconscious plagiarism. "If we can't trust the American police, the only thing is to do it ourselves."

Helen laughed.

"My good Tom," she said. "What good could you do there? You'd be like a lamb in the wolf-fold!"

Tom eyed her coldly.

"You have said that before; it remains to be seen whether you are right," he said.

Helen raised her eyebrows.

"Oh!" she said. "Sir Thomas of the High Horse, is it?"

Tom disdained to answer, but turned to the serious business of the moment.

"I might be able to get in touch with some private detective," he said. "If I can find a trustworthy one, we could work together—I could at least keep an eye on him. I think we could probably find Keeling—that's to say, if the defence thinks it worth while to engage a detective—I'm afraid I couldn't manage him out of my own pocket. Of course, I should pay my own expenses."

"Of course, you'll do nothing of the kind," retorted Turnbull. "It's a sound idea and I'll ask Charles Morden if he'll authorize the expense. As a matter of fact, I met an American in the War—at a machine-gun course—who was in Pinkerton's. I believe his name was Quackett, or something comic like that. We can probably find out if there is such a chap there now and I

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could give you a letter of introduction to him. We were rather thick for the two or three weeks we were at the course—funny how one used to pall up violently with a fellow and know him as well as a brother and then never see him again, probably forget all about him.”

“What about Queenstown?” interposed Helen, who was not altogether pleased at Tom’s idea—on which she had poured scorn—being taken seriously. “I thought Tom was to do that? Now I suppose I shall have to.”

“Oh, no, I’ll do it myself,” said Turnbull. “Jolly good of you to offer, all the same,” he added as an after-thought.

So it was arranged. Charles Morden gratefully agreed to Tom’s offer to go to America and readily authorized the payment of his expenses and those of a private detective. Turnbull discovered that there was one Hiram P. Quackett employed in Pinkerton’s Central Bureau, New York, who could hardly be other than his machine-gun friend. Helen relented to the extent of paying a farewell visit to the Palace Cinema with Tom on the eve of his departure for New York. As the curtain drew across the inevitable cloud-veiled moon, Tom deliberately possessed himself of Helen’s hand.

“Helen, dear,” he whispered. “I know you treat me and my love as a joke, but if I pull this off—if I prove to you that I really am a man and that I can face dangers and responsibilities like these wonderful fellows

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on the screen—will you take me seriously then, and try and love me just a little bit?"

Helen, unemotional as she was, could not be altogether untouched by the romance of Tom's love nor unmoved by the tribute to herself which she knew his coming venture implied. She was conscious that she had not treated Tom well, and that to encourage hope in his heart now might be no real kindness, but the cruelty of a rebuff to him in his present mood was more than she was ready to shoulder. She looked steadily into his eager eyes.

"It's splendid of you to go, Tom," she said. "I shall think of you all the time. Don't think I treat you as a joke—it simply is that I'm not capable of loving anyone as you do—not at present, at any rate—I may be some day."

She gave his hand a little pat and released her own. Felix strode into view, turned and strode back frowning. . . .

On the following morning Tom sailed, and Helen and Turnbull saw him off. As they turned their backs on the rapidly receding ship, Turnbull suggested that Helen should lunch with him, but Helen had other fish to fry and declined. She had, in fact, determined that Tom should not be the only one to take a line of his own in this business. Turnbull had said that two conditions were needed for success, the recovery of Keeling, and the revelation of Lilith Morden's escapade with

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Charles. Tom Fairbanks was seeing to the first; she, Helen, would attend to the second.

Instead of lunching, therefore, she got on a bicycle and made her way to Knowsley and Knowsley House. When she got there, Mrs. James Morden had just finished her own lunch, but she none the less thought it necessary to keep her husband's secretary waiting ten minutes while she drank her coffee, and ran her eye through the *Tatler*. That done, however, she received Helen agreeably enough.

"Good morning, Miss Mildmay," she said. "You've had lunch, of course. What about some coffee?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Morden."

"It's nice of you to come and see me. Life's been a bit gloomy since we last met."

Helen was amazed at the woman's nerve. Knowing, as she did, some at least of what must be on Lilith Morden's conscience, she could not but admire the *sang-froid* with which she was facing her very difficult position. Cruel and heartless the woman was, but Helen felt grateful to her for not posing as a heart-broken martyr.

"I came to see you about Mr. Charles Morden," said Helen, who had made up her mind to go straight to the point.

She saw Lilith stiffen, but her discomposure was so slight that only a keen observer would have noticed it. After a barely discernible pause, she spoke in the same casual voice.

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"Oh, poor old Charles? I didn't know you'd seen him. Have those stupid police let him out?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Morden. That depends on you," replied Helen quietly.

This could hardly fail to bring Lilith to business, nor did it. She slowly turned her fine eyes upon Helen and stared at her with undisguised hostility.

"What on earth do you mean?" she said. "Explain yourself."

"You know what I mean, Mrs. Morden. If you tell the police that Mr. Charles Morden thought he was going with you to America, they will release him."

"Going with me? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Is it worth while to keep on pretending? It might impress an outsider, but it's wasted on me. I know. And, of course, it can quite easily be proved."

"Then why isn't it proved?"

"Because Mr. Morden won't let us say anything about it; unless you tell the police yourself, they'll never know and very likely Mr. Morden will be hanged. You can save him by a word."

Lilith gave a hard laugh.

"My good girl," she said. "You're suffering from an overdose of the movies. 'Perfect English gentleman, soul of honour, dies in silence rather than allow a breath of scandal to smirch the name of his ladylove!' You little fool, do you believe that sort of rubbish?"

Helen, with difficulty, restrained her anger. She

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had come here to persuade Lilith to speak; spitting at her wouldn't have that effect, though it would be satisfactory.

"Mrs. Morden," she said. "Please think what you are doing. I know it would be a horribly difficult thing to do, but it would be a splendid, an heroic thing. Think of what it means to him; think of him in prison all these weeks, waiting, waiting for you to come to his rescue. Think of the prospect of death coming nearer and nearer, and, worse still for him, the hopeless despair of feeling that he is deserted by the woman he loves."

Helen was amazed at her own eloquence, unconscious of the fact that Lilith had correctly diagnosed its source. She was about to continue, to work up to a further climax, when Lilith interrupted her.

"You're wonderfully persuasive," she said. "May I ask the cause of all this solicitude on your part?"

She stared insolently at Helen, and the latter, to her intense mortification, felt herself gradually beginning to blush.

Lilith burst into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, that's the trouble, is it?" she exclaimed. "'Gal-lant employer and lovely secretary! Is she frail as she is fair?' Oh, lucky Charles! Oh, my poor James, what temptations you have been subjected to!"

Helen sprang to her feet, in a blaze of anger.

"You beast!" she cried. "You heartless, cruel beast! You'd let a man die to save your wretched reputation—and what a reputation to save! I shouldn't wonder if

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you didn't kill your husband yourself. You're quite capable of it!"

Lilith in her turn was moved. She, too, sprang to her feet.

"Get out of my house!" she cried. "Get out, you . . . . .!"

Helen did not wait to hear the end of the sentence. She slammed the drawing-room door behind her, and then the front door. When she had also slammed the garden gate, she began to feel better.

Lilith had remained standing, and Helen would have been surprised to see that her face was deathly white. When the last sound of Helen's audible departure had ceased, she suddenly flung herself down on the sofa and buried her face in her arms.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"



## CHAPTER XXI

### SOME OF THE TRUTH

SUPERINTENDENT DODD had told the Chief Constable that he would go to Queenstown to look into the validity of Charles Morden's alibi. As a fact, he did not do so, but sent Inspector Vernon to carry out this straightforward routine work, reserving for himself a task that he thought would require more brain work—an investigation of the mystery of James Morden and his 1st of April bus ride. He had borrowed from Turnbull the faked photograph of the black-moustached James and with it he betook himself to the offices of the North Liverpool and Local Omnibus Company. The Clerk at once confirmed the facts which Tom had discovered as to the closing of route "F" up to the end of March. He was also able to inform the detective that one of the omnibuses on that route should have just come in, and that he would very likely find the driver and conductor getting some lunch in the refreshment bar, run on the premises by the Company.

Dodd found the two men smoking a cigarette on a bench outside the refreshment bar. He introduced

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himself, asked if they could manage another glass apiece, and presently was seated between them on the bench, with a glass in one hand and a pipe in the other. The ceremony of introduction being thus satisfactorily completed he went straight to business. It at once transpired that his hospitality had not been wasted. George Punchell, the conductor, immediately recognized the photograph of the disguised James.

"Why, that's the Heavy Dragoon!" he said.

It appeared that young Punchell was a devotee of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas which occasionally came to Liverpool. The original of the photograph had at once struck him as bearing a strong resemblance to those magnificent heavy-moustached beings in "uniform richly gold-laced" who formed the bass chorus in the first act of *Patience*.

As to the exact date of the occasion on which he had punched a ticket for the deceased "dragoon," he felt pretty sure that it was the first day on which route "F" had been re-opened, because, not many people being as yet aware of the re-opening, there had been very few travellers and the gentleman of the moustache had had the bus pretty much to himself. It was the early afternoon run, leaving Liverpool at 2 p.m. He had got in, Punchell remembered, just beyond Formby—not in the village itself, but just beyond the last houses of it. The exact spot could probably be fairly closely identified because if it had been beyond the fourteenth milestone, which was practically on the out-

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skirts of Formby, it would have been an eight-penny and not a nine-penny ticket to Southport Town Hall—the bus' last stage—at which the gentleman had alighted.

Punchell could not remember anything particular about the gentleman's appearance except his moustache. He thought he probably had on a dark suit and either a bowler or a Trilby, but he could not be certain. The gentleman had not spoken, except to ask for his ticket.

"You didn't see which way he went after he got out, I suppose?" said Dodd.

"Not far," replied the observant conductor. "But he went down Lord Street—that leads towards Hesketh Park and the golf links. And that was the way he came back."

"Came back!" exclaimed Dodd. "Do you mean to say you brought him back, too?"

"We did that. Ordinarily, of course, we should have got straight back, but that day we had engine trouble—magnetos, wasn't it, Charlie?"

Charles murmured something about "make-and-break," and Punchell continued.

"That'd fix it as the first day of the route being open—first of April, that is—because the bus had been laid up while it was closed and Charlie here got into trouble for not having her tuned up before he started. Not his fault, of course. He was put on another job and only got back to this old bus that morning. Anyway, we had to hang about for an hour or so while Charlie fixed her. Just before we started this fellow

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came along up Lord Street in a hurry and popped in. If I remember rightly, he went right into Formby that time and only got out at the Liverpool end. That would have been about half past five; we were back in the garage soon after six."

Dodd questioned the conductor closely, but was unable to get any further particulars from him. Punchell had not noticed what direction Morden had taken after getting out in Formby; there were more passengers then and he had probably been busy getting them off and on the bus.

The detective did not wait for the "middle-afternoon" run of his friend's bus, but took a taxi and drove straight out to Southport, directing the driver to drop him at police headquarters. The superintendent-in-charge directed him at once to the sub-station in Manchester Road, of which Sergeant Lakspur—a particularly able officer, according to the Superintendent—was in charge.

Sergeant Lakspur at once demonstrated his efficiency. He did not himself know the gentleman, whose photograph Dodd showed him, by sight, but he fancied that he might answer a description given to him by Police-Constable Waddell, who was on the Hesketh Park patrol. It would save trouble and time if Sergeant Lakspur did not himself attempt to tell the story to the detective, but took the latter direct to the man who knew all about it. He thought he would be able to find him. Superintendent Dodd came to the conclusion

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that the Southport police must be something in the nature of a "mutual admiration society," for the walk to Hesketh Park was punctuated by the Sergeant's anecdotes illustrating his subordinate's amazing powers of observation. Not a hairpin, it would seem, could fall from the head of the most insignificant nursery-maid without P.C. Waddell being aware of the fact, and drawing from it, as like as not, conclusions of the most significant nature. Nothing, indeed, but a tendency to prolong unduly his visits of inspection in area regions had kept Mr. Waddell's tunic innocent of braid.

The detective certainly had no cause to complain of this prodigy's powers in respect of the original of the photograph which he submitted to P.C. Waddell's inspection when the latter was duly intercepted in Park Crescent. P.C. Waddell knew the gentleman well, had known him for months—not to speak to, indeed, but by sight. The gentleman was in the habit of visiting at Atlantic Cottage—a "bijou" residence inhabited by a Mrs. Stoop, at the edge of the golf links. He came, on an average, once a week, always walking, but on one occasion the constable, when off duty, had seen him getting into a car which he had parked in the Crescent, about ten minutes' walk away. P.C. Waddell thought he had got a note of the number of the car in an old note-book—the incident had occurred two or three months previously.

Mrs. Stoop, whose Christian name was understood to be Minnie, was a lady of some thirty years of age, of

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considerable attraction, and probably private means, as she appeared to carry on no profession, and was attended by a "cap and apron" maid. She lived very quietly and apparently respectably, but on more than one occasion P.C. Waddell had observed the gentleman in question leaving Atlantic Cottage at an hour of the morning which did not suggest a formal call. Apart from him Mrs. Stoop received no gentleman visitors—and not many ladies—until about two months ago, when P.C. Waddell had observed that a young man of elegant appearance had begun to pay calls of an increasingly protracted period. Height, five feet nine, age thirty to thirty-three, hair brown, eyes grey, clothes well cut and various, signet ring on left hand, slight limp, was the nearest description that the constable could give without reference to the afore-mentioned completed note-book.

Questioned by the detective, P.C. Waddell did not think that the two gentlemen had ever met, or were even aware of each other's existence. There had been no sign of a quarrel between Mrs. Stoop and the first gentleman, though certainly the latter had paid no visit now for some weeks. Reference to the note-book now in use disclosed, after much licking of thumb, the fact that the last visit had been on Friday, the 1st of April, at 3.40 p.m. P.C. Waddell had not on that occasion seen the gentleman leave. The other gentleman had not, so far as P.C. Waddell was aware, visited the house that day. He had done so frequently since.



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Superintendent Dodd was not surprised that the taker of such copious notes about matters of apparently trivial importance should have achieved some reputation for perspicacity. He congratulated the constable and asked him to accompany him to Atlantic Cottage and wait in the vicinity while he paid a call there. Sergeant Lakspur was encouraged to return to his duty.

Superintendent Dodd was ushered by the "cap and apron" maid into a tiny and rather overcrowded sitting-room. Bright chintzes and brighter flowers gave a first impression of cheerfulness that was not borne out by a closer inspection of the rather dirty wallpaper and undusted knickknacks. However, the arrival of Minnie Stoop—Mrs. or otherwise—quickly distracted the eye from material surroundings. She was an undoubtedly pretty woman, of the "petite" and rather helpless type that appeals to the James Mordens of this world. The detective was soon of the opinion, however, that though her type might be "helpless," she herself was not. The pathetic little smile that greeted him was belied by the firmness with which she declined to be jockeyed into a chair facing the light.

"I understand, madam," began the Superintendent, after he had explained something of his errand and authority, "that you are acquainted with a gentleman whose movements have become a matter of interest to the police. I do not know by what name he was known to you, but probably not by that under which he us-



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ually passed. That is the gentleman to whom I am referring."

He suddenly thrust the photograph of James Morden and moustache under Mrs. Stoop's nose, scrutinizing closely its effect upon her. The effect was disappointing. Mrs. Stoop glanced at it and handed it quietly back.

"Oh, yes," she said. "That is Mr. Raymond. I know him well."

Without more than conventional pressure Mrs. Stoop acknowledged that "Mr. Raymond" had been her "friend" for nearly a year, that he had last visited her on the first of April, when he told her that he was going abroad for a year or two and gave her one hundred pounds in treasury notes, that since then she had found a new "friend" in the person of Mr. Ralph Charman, of Wigan, and that there was but the smallest likelihood of these two "friends" being aware of each other's existence.

This was straightforward enough; it explained James Morden's presence in Southport, but it threw no light upon the manner of his death. The detective decided to press home his attack.

"You are aware, I suppose, madam, that this 'Mr. Raymond' has been murdered?" he asked.

Were the start of surprise, the look of consternation, quite genuine? All through the interview the detective had been conscious of a slight tension in his companion's manner which seemed to suggest the expectation of some such question as this.

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"When the gentleman visited you, when he—er—stayed with you from time to time, did he retain his false moustache?"

This second question was the key that finally unlocked the ultimate door of secrecy. Of course, "Mr. Raymond" had not always retained his false moustache in moments of intimacy and, of course, Mrs. Stoop had recognized the photograph of the clean-shaven James Morden which had appeared in all the newspapers at the time of his disappearance. It was useless, then, to deny knowledge of Mr. Raymond's death. The fact that she had not communicated with the police was easily explained by Mrs. Stoop's dislike of publicity—besides, what had she to say that could elucidate the problem? Although he spent another half hour in questioning the poor lady, Superintendent Dodd satisfied himself that she had indeed told him all that she knew. He took his leave, promising silence if silence were at all possible.

Having thanked P.C. Waddell for his help and told him, somewhat superfluously, to keep his eyes open, Dodd returned to his taxi and had himself driven to Formby. Here his enquiries proved much less fruitful. No one—policeman, tradesman, postman, scavenger—had any recollection of seeing anyone resembling the photograph presented for inspection. After nearly two hours of fruitless work—he had dismissed his taxi when a blank draw of the police station told him his search was going to be a long one—he gave up an apparently

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hopeless task and was about to look for a bus or other means of return to Liverpool when it occurred to him to walk down Formby Bank and see whether he could draw inspiration from the scene—not of the crime, but of the discovery of the body.

As he walked down towards the beach he passed a group of cottages at a point known as the Battery. As a matter of routine he stopped to show his photograph to an old man, apparently a retired longshoreman—if a longshoreman can ever be said to retire—who sat in the doorway of his dilapidated home, smoking a clay pipe and gazing dreamily out over the bay. To his intense surprise the old fellow questioned him closely about the details of the story and, having satisfied himself, perhaps, that the man was not wanted for any sympathetic crime, he revealed the fact that on the first of April—he remembered the date because he had received a quarterly allowance from an old employer that day—he had noticed that the empty cottage next door to his showed evident signs of occupation. Early in the morning, smoke had emerged from the chimney for the first time for many months and soon after dinner—a crab that his son had brought him—a stranger had emerged from the cottage, and keeping to the backs of the other houses, had made his way towards Formby. Although he had not seen him close to, and his eyesight was not what it had been, the old man felt positive that a large black moustache had formed a prominent part of the stranger's make-up.

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He did not see him return. He always retired into his house at sundown and shut all the doors and windows to keep out the night air. Nor had he seen him since. The following morning no smoke had emerged from the chimney, nor any subsequent morning. The cottage had always had a few sticks of furniture in it—it was supposed to be “to let furnished”—to artists and such like—and as far as could be seen through the windows everything was as it had been for months.

Dodd gathered that the old man had seen no one besides the stranger with the black moustache, nor heard anything on the night of the first of April. He learnt that the key could be obtained from Mrs. Ousel, up at the Old Street post office.

At the Old Street post office, however, nothing was known of the key. The cottage had been let towards the end of March to a gentleman of the name of Pratten, easily identified by the old postmistress as the original of the photograph. Dodd cursed himself for not having tried this post office in the course of his enquiries. After failing at the police station he had gone straight to the post office in the High Street and, failing there also, had not thought to enquire whether there was another. This office, being in a back street near the shore, had escaped his notice.

The postmistress, Mrs. Ousel, acted as agent for the owner of the cottage, a Mr. Breitberg, of Everton, to whom apparently it had come by distraint. Mr. Pratten had taken the cottage for a month, but at the ex-

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piration of his tenancy had neither renewed it nor returned the key. The latter was not in the door nor had Mr. Breitberg, though informed of the loss, yet supplied another.

Superintendent Dodd felt that the scent was hot enough to justify him in a little housebreaking. He therefore returned to the cottage in question, broke a pane in a back window and, inserting his hand through the hole thus made, pushed back the catch. The room into which he climbed was evidently a bedroom. It had a wooden floor, a fireplace, a wash-stand, a towel-horse, a chest of drawers, two chairs and a bed. On the bed was a mattress, with blankets—evidently “disposals”—but no sheets. On the pillow, however, was a case of good linen. Examining it carefully, Dodd found in one corner traces of what might have been initials carefully picked out, but it was impossible to decipher what they had been. Beyond this fact there appeared at first sight to be nothing significant in the room and, postponing a more detailed survey, the detective passed into the front room. This proved to be a kitchen living-room and was, in fact, apart from a tiny scullery and larder, the only other room in the house. It had a tiled floor, a range, a substantial table, a dilapidated arm-chair, two Windsor chairs, and a dresser. Dodd examined the range and found the ashes of what appeared to be a wood fire. A large kettle, half-filled with water, stood on the plate, and two or three discolored sauce-pans and frying pans hung at the side of the range.

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In a cupboard let into the wall were some odd pieces of cheap crockery and one battered knife, fork and spoon.

In the small larder was a loaf of bread and some scraps of another loaf, all mildewed. Three tins of sardines, a piece of cheese, and some tinned fruit indicated that the late occupier had not relied upon his own culinary skill, the fire probably having been confined to the service of the kettle. Every indication pointed to the fact that the tenancy had only been—and was only intended to be—a short one, but there was so far no proof as to who the tenant had been, nor whether he had received any visitors. As to the first point, Dodd felt no doubt, but on the second he was badly in need of information.

Feeling badly at a loss, and not a little tired, the Superintendent sat down in the arm-chair, but as its springs were resting upon the floor it proved less than comfortable. He transferred himself to one of the Windsor chairs, which instantly collapsed under him, precipitating him violently to the floor. Picking himself up with some profanity, and rubbing an injured elbow, Dodd glared at the offending chair with an expression of savage anger that gradually changed to one of interest.

Why should that chair have let him down so suddenly and so completely? An examination soon provided an answer. Two of the legs on the same side were broken—not dislocated from their sockets, but broken



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clean off short, the pieces lying on the ground apart from the remainder of the chair. But they had not appeared to be broken before he sat on the chair—he must have noticed and rejected such an unstable seat—indeed, the chair could not have stood up in its present condition. But surely his weight, ample though it was, was not sufficient to create such havoc? Dodd examined the broken ends carefully and came to the conclusion that, though the break was quite recent, it was not so recent as one minute ago. It followed that after the chair had been broken, it had been propped up upon its broken ends which fitted together sufficiently well to give it at least an appearance of stability. But why had so much trouble been taken? Surely nobody could have thought that the chair could be of any service in that condition? No, it must have been done purely for appearance. Could it be that the chair had been smashed in a struggle and reinstated in order to conceal the fact of that struggle?

Superintendent Dodd looked carefully round for further evidence in support of this theory. If there had been a struggle, there might be blood, and if blood, where more likely than the wall or the floor? A glance showed that there was none on the wall; the floor was more difficult. The red absorbent tiles were probably, of all materials, the least likely to show a stain, though such a dark and sticky substance as blood should show anywhere. There was not a sign of it. Could it have been washed to get rid of the blood stains? It was



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possible, but, search as he would, the detective could find no direct evidence to prove it.

Leaving the kitchen for a time, Dodd returned to the bedroom and made a detailed search. There were no clothes in the drawers nor any personal belongings save a small comb, shaving kit, a tooth brush, and a face sponge. Dodd examined the sponge carefully; clearly it had not been used for washing the kitchen floor. He stood in the middle of the room and gazed round it, searching for inspiration. Bed, blankets, pillow, chair, chest of drawers, chair, towel-horse, wash-stand. That was all; what possible clue was there to be extracted from these things? Washstand, towel-horse . . . towel-horse! Where was the towel? Why was there no towel? Everything else that a man must have for a night or two—assuming that he slept in his shirt and had no sheets—was here; obviously he must have had a towel. Why was it not here? A towel, too—the very thing that would be used, for mopping up a mess on the floor.

Feverishly Dodd set to work to search the house from end to end—not a big job. No sign of a towel. Of course, if it had been used for such a purpose, it would not have been left here; it would have been taken away, destroyed. He was about to give up in despair when he saw in the scullery a trap-door in the ceiling. Standing on a chair and pushing up the trap he found that it gave access to the low space between the ceiling and the roof. He lit a match and saw that the thick dust

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on the floor of this tiny attic had been recently disturbed. Pulling himself up, with some difficulty, he tried to trace the direction of these marks and thought he could make out that they led to one side of the roof. He followed the line on his hands and knees and, lighting match after match, searched every cranny that he could see. He was soon rewarded; a piece of material caught his eye and he drew out from behind a ceiling-joint what appeared to be the object of his search. Dropping down into the scullery he examined it by the light of day. It was indeed a towel, unmarked, but of good linen, and smothered with a mixture of dirt, earthenware, and diluted blood.

## CHAPTER XXII

### NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH?

SUPERINTENDENT DODD was uncertain whether to report his discovery to his chief or to keep it for a while to himself. His last interview with Major Waring had not left a happy memory in his mind—it had taken too nearly the form of a reprimand. Should he show how quickly he had got on to a new line, or should he remain silent in hope of bringing off a sensational coup? Being very tired and very hungry, he decided to postpone a decision till after he had had his supper, and by the time he had got outside four sausages, three rashers of bacon, a selection of potatoes, cauliflower and tomatoes, two baked apples, a hunk of cheese, the top of a loaf, half a cucumber, and two pints of beer, he was so somnolent that he was unable to decide anything except the most suitable moment to go to bed.

The following morning he was still undecided, but thought that a visit to his office, with possible news from Vernon in Queenstown, might give him a lead. There was no news from Vernon. As a preliminary to further action Dodd dispatched Inspector Sheppard to

Wigan to enquire into the existence, address, employment, reputation, and movements of Mr. Ralph Charman, Mrs. Stoop's new friend, though he hardly expected to find him under that name. His instructions to Sheppard were hardly completed when he received a summons to the Chief Constable's room. It appeared probable that his mind would be made up for him; the Chief would ask him what he had done yesterday and he would have to say. But in that supposition he was wrong.

"Good morning, Dodd," said Major Waring. "I have just had a letter from Mrs. James Morden. She wants to make a statement, in the presence of"—he glanced at the letter—"myself, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Mildmay. She doesn't mention you, but I shall certainly ask her to agree to your being present. She is coming at twelve o'clock; will you arrange for Mr. Turnbull and Mildmay to be here then?"

"Very good, sir," replied Dodd. "Will you have the dictaphone?"

The Chief Constable considered for a moment.

"I don't think so," he said. "There will be plenty of witnesses."

Soon after a quarter-past twelve Lilith Morden was shown into the room in which the Chief Constable, Superintendent Dodd, Turnbull and Mildmay were already assembled. Major Waring greeted her with a grave smile and drew forward a chair to the right hand side of his desk.

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"Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Mildmay are here, as you see, Mrs. Morden," he said. "If, as I suppose, the statement you wish to make refers to your husband's death, have you any objection to Superintendent Dodd being present? He is in charge of the case."

"Not in the least," replied Lilith, carelessly. "But don't imagine that I'm going to confess to the murder—I should hate to disappoint you."

Lilith spoke in her usual cool, rather supercilious, voice. But her face was white, and there were dark rings under her eyes.

Waring sat at his desk, with Dodd at his left elbow. Turnbull and Mildmay sat at the end of the desk opposite Mrs. Morden. There was a little pause while Lilith examined her finger-nails. Then she began in the same unemotional voice.

"I've come to the conclusion I'd better tell you about my husband. It's ridiculous keeping Charles in prison all this time; there can't be any real evidence against him. Still, as you won't let him go, I suppose I must tell you what happened. It's rather a bore, but . . . I thought Mr. Turnbull had better hear about it as he's the family lawyer. And Mr. Mildmay, because he represents the firm. I didn't know it would have to be a sort of police-court show."

Lilith paused, but Waring refused to rise to this sally, and she continued:—

"I don't know how much you know. I know Mr. Turnbull knows a good deal, but not everything. I

suppose I'd better begin at the beginning. Of course, the War's at the bottom of the whole trouble. You know what it did to trade, and Mr. Mildmay can tell you what it did to shipping. I don't know much about it, but my husband told me there was nothing coming in from the business. We'd got practically nothing of our own and we were neither of us good at living on nothing. We've always lived well—good servants, good food, and so on. I've always been decently dressed and James was always fond of amusing himself—greyhounds, racing, cards, and so on. Anyhow, we didn't feel inclined to retire into lodgings and wear last year's clothes.

"We used to talk about how we could make some money. We turned over all sorts of schemes—some of them not particularly honest, perhaps. Then some story in the papers put the idea into my head. Prohibition had sent the price of whisky and wine up enormously in America. Fortunes were being made out of running it; why shouldn't we make one? We'd got ships, we dealt with wine and whisky merchants. That was as far as I went. James worked out the details. I don't really know much about them, but I expect you'll be able to find out from what I can tell you. Anyhow, he started a separate business under the name of Hallington, somewhere off the Vauxhall Road. It began in quite a small way, more or less on the square, until he should get to know the ropes, he said. He didn't make much out of it besides dodging super-tax.

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But after a bit he saw how a good deal more could be made, and it became real smuggling.

"He had to take one of the ship's captains—Keeling, of the *Snark*—in with him; that was the only way of doing it. Nobody else knew anything about it, and it was a bore having to share the proceeds, but it did so well that we began to think that we were going to be able to live quite comfortably always; there didn't seem to be any reason why we should be found out. Then the income tax people began to get inquisitive—I don't quite know why. Anyhow, James said they were making very awkward enquiries. He'd got all his extra money from this Hallington business in separate banking accounts—one here, and one in Manchester—and he was afraid they'd find out about that and then it might all come out. At last he got so windy about it that he decided to clear everything he could and do a bolt. Whether it was really necessary or not I don't know. I believe Keeling thought it wasn't, and they had a bit of a row about killing the goose. But my husband had been drinking rather a lot and I think he lost his nerve. Anyway, he decided to bolt."

Upon only one member of her audience had this illuminating story any marked effect. Herbert Mildmay had listened to it with obvious amazement and growing anxiety. To the other three men it was no news.

"For various reasons," continued Lilith, "he decided to make his disappearance look like death. That would



put a stop to anything in the way of pursuit, and very likely the Hallington business and the Manchester banking account wouldn't come out. I don't quite know why he didn't want them to, except, of course, for the fair name of Morden. He may have thought they'd come in useful again sometime—I don't know about that.

"But if it was to be death, he said, it'd have to be murder. Suicide would knock the life insurance on the head, and I wanted that; besides, it would mean a lot of investigations into his affairs and, as I've said, he didn't want that. Accident was no good because the insurance people would never swallow an accident without a corpse—they wouldn't pay up for years. So it had to be murder. Of course, that needed a good deal of working out, but James had done so much of that over his Hallington business that he rather fancied himself at it. I believe he did it partly because he enjoyed doing it. Anyhow, he concocted a pretty complete scheme to make it appear as if he had been murdered by Charles—and he seems to have taken some of you in pretty successfully."

Even Turnbull, who knew the whole story—so far as it affected Charles—and the two policemen, who were hardened to most of the human aspects of crime, could not quite conceal their horror at the calm way in which this young and lovely woman spoke of a scheme, so diabolically cruel, directed against a man who loved her. And yet, was she completely callous, or was her manner

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deliberately adopted to cloak some deeper feeling? Turnbull felt that it was, that in her eyes he could read something like apprehension, or could it be remorse? The more downright Chief Constable made no attempt to analyse what he heard and saw; he barely attempted to conceal the disgust that he felt. Dodd looked stolid enough, his little eyes firmly fixed upon the woman's face; Herbert Mildmay sat white and motionless, only the distension of his pupils and the nervous fidgeting of a hand upon his trousers revealing the depths of his feelings.

"The great thing, of course, was to get Charles to do something to incriminate himself. That was my job. He'd been in love with me for years, but, of course, I had choked him off—he's a dull stick. But as soon as James had made his plan, I began to encourage Charles and gradually we got thicker and thicker—he thinking, I suppose, that he was making a great conquest. As a matter of fact, I got rather to like him; he isn't a bad sort in a way. Anyhow, about the end of February, when James had got everything cut and dried, I agreed to run away to America with Charles. We had to give him time to make his plans—it was an awkward month—not knowing whether he wouldn't give the show away somehow. At last he'd got it all fixed up, rooms booked in New York, a scheme for covering up our own tracks so that the injured husband shouldn't follow us, money, clothes, and so on, arranged. I had had to pretty well settle the actual date—or rather jockey

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Charles into choosing one I wanted—to fit in with James's plan. Then came James's turn.

"I don't know exactly what happened, but I know what was meant to happen. James was to entice Charles down to the dock on the evening we were due to start. He was to arrange it so that they were both seen together there, but only Charles seen to leave. He was to work up some sort of quarrel with Charles—about me, I believe—so as to make Charles angry, and send him off, rather flustered, by himself. Then James was to fake the scene of a struggle—marks on the ground, blood and so on. The blood was actually his own, taken from a vein and kept in a small bottle; James was a bit of an artist and he wasn't going to risk chicken's blood, which might show up in an analysis. I believe there was something about a handkerchief and a weight to be thrown into the dock or the river, but I didn't follow what it was about. When he'd done all that, he was to slip down into a boat that Keeling was to leave tied up somewhere, row himself down the river and land in some place where he wouldn't be seen. Then he was to make his way to a cottage he'd taken at Formby at a place called Battery Point, and wait there till Keeling picked him up a night or two later.

"Then I come in again. Charles had arranged to pick me up some distance from Knowsley at eleven o'clock that night, and we were to drive to Crewe and catch the 1.25 to Swansea. I'd no intention of catching

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that train, because I meant to be back in my house before daybreak. James delayed him as long as he could, but that couldn't be long enough, so I made up a story about being unable to get away earlier, and didn't get down to the Prescott road—where I was to meet him—till after twelve. We'd worked out the exact time—my husband and I—and that just left the remotest outside chance of catching the 1.25—just enough to make Charles try to catch it, but no real chance, unless it were late. If, by bad luck, it was late and we got there in time, I was to get out first and enquire and come back to Charles and say it had gone. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what happened, but Charles swallowed it all like a lamb and went off to garage the car.

"We arranged to go by the next train—9.22 in the morning. By the way, I ought to have said that we were to travel separately as far as Queenstown. I stipulated for that, nominally to put James off the track; actually, of course, to make our great substitution act possible.

"I needn't go into all that in great detail, because Mr. Turnbull knows all about it. What happened was that my twin sister, who is sufficiently like me to be able to pass herself off as me at a distance—she's an actress—took my place. We swapped clothes in a hotel. She went on to Swansea and Fishguard and gave Charles the slip there. I hired a car and drove back to Knowsley—or, rather, a bit short of it—and was in my bed by five. Not a soul knew I'd ever left the house.

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So there you are. There's Charles Morden's alibi. Now, perhaps, you'll let him out."

Lilith picked up her gloves and vanity bag, which she had laid on the desk, and rose from her chair. The Chief Constable, however, remained seated.

"One moment, Mrs. Morden, please," he said.

Something in his voice or look checked Lilith in her obvious intention to walk out of the room, still covered by her cloak of careless cynicism. For a moment she hesitated; then, as Major Waring continued to look at her in silence, slowly resumed her seat.

"I'm afraid I didn't quite realize what form your statement was going to take," said the Chief Constable. "I should perhaps have stopped you, and warned you that you were incriminating yourself. However, it is in a sense King's Evidence, and the Public Prosecutor may decide not to take action. What you have told us amounts, of course, to an attempt to defeat the ends of justice."

Lilith stared at him in amazement, almost in horror.

"Prosecutor!" she said. "Incriminating! What do you mean?"

"I think you understand my meaning, Mrs. Morden," said Waring, drily. "It must be quite clear to a woman of your obvious intelligence—ingenuity, I might say. But we need not follow that up now. As I say, the authorities may decide not to prosecute. That does not rest with me. The immediate point is the effect of this information upon the case against Mr. Charles Morden.

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Do I understand, Turnbull," he said, turning to the solicitor, "that you knew all about this?"

"I did, but Charles Morden wouldn't let me make use of it. He did not want to injure Mrs. Morden's reputation."

The words were courteous enough, but Dodd, who was watching Mrs. Morden closely, saw her wince—the first time in the interview that any such sign had been visible.

"Morden told me his side of the story," continued Turnbull. "Of course, he didn't understand what had happened. We worked that out for ourselves—or rather, young Fairbanks did. I can give you the details some time, Chief. I begged Morden to let me tell you, but he absolutely refused. All he would do was to write to Mrs. James Morden and ask her to see him through if she could. She told me he was a liar and a cad."

Again Dodd saw the wince. Could it be that this woman's armour—her cold and steely nerve—was buckling? Certainly she had not now the control of herself that she had shown all through the first part of the interview. But why, thought the detective, should this be? The possibility of a prosecution, which she must always have realized, was surely not enough to frighten a woman of her type; whatever else she lacked, it was not courage. Could there be something more that she was afraid of?

The Chief Constable was speaking again.



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"I see," he said. "As Mrs. Morden said, he is evidently a stupid man. It would have saved most of us—even possibly Mrs. Morden—a good deal of trouble if we had known all this at once. But I am afraid that it makes no difference now to the case against him. We have known for some time, madam," (Turnbull noticed the change in his form of address; she had been "Mrs. Morden"—a friend) "that your husband was not killed on the night on which Mr. Charles Morden left Liverpool—on the 31st of March."

A flicker of anxiety seemed to cross the grey eyes that Dodd was watching so closely now.

"Not on that night?" exclaimed Lilith. "Then why are you keeping him?"

"We think it possible that he came back from Queenstown on the Saturday or Sunday. But Mr. Turnbull has a different theory. It might be as well, Turnbull, if you told Mrs. Morden what your theory is. She may be able to throw some light on that, too."

Turnbull looked doubtfully at the Chief Constable. He evidently did not quite like the idea of disclosing his case before a person who was certainly an accomplice in the conspiracy against his client, and who might attempt to warn her fellow-conspirator, Keeling, of his danger. However, he thought, this was hardly likely, as the man had murdered her husband and gone off with what might be considered as her share of the booty.

"Very well," he said. "If you think it desirable.



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You know my theory, Chief, and so does Superintendent Dodd, here. But Mr. Mildmay doesn't. I'm afraid it'll be a bit of a shock for you, Mildmay."

Poor little Mildmay looked as if one shock more or less would make a very little difference now. Within half an hour he had heard that the respected head of his firm was a swindler, a smuggler, and the originator of a foul and cold-blooded conspiracy against his own partner, and he had listened to a young and beautiful woman—a real lady, as he had always thought her—coolly disclosing her own heartless and contemptible share in this callous crime. No wonder that he looked white and shaken, and that his only answer to Turnbull's kindly reference to himself was a rather pathetic attempt at a smile.

"As I said just now," continued Turnbull, "I have known for a long time the real explanation of Charles Morden's flight. Superintendent Dodd has this theory that he came back from Queenstown to commit a murder. Why on earth should he? Anyhow, that can be quite easily proved or disproved. As a matter of fact, I was just starting for Queenstown myself to look into it when I got your message that I was wanted here. My theory is much simpler and much more conclusive, though it may not be easy to prove. Mrs. Morden has told us that Captain Keeling, of the *Snark*, was an accomplice in this smuggling business and that it was arranged that he should pick up Morden at Formby on his way out. She hasn't told us—she may not know—

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that her husband had drawn all his considerable savings out of his Manchester bank, and had on him that night a considerable sum of money—probably at least £6,000. Nor has she told us that the *Snark* had on board eight hundred cases of whisky which were not going to be disposed of in the old, comparatively safe way for a modest profit, but sold 'over the counter' to American rum-runners in Rum Row for an enormous price—probably £8,000 or more.

"Now, what happened? We know from the third officer of the *Snark*, who got chicken-pox—they thought it was smallpox—and was put ashore at Queenstown, that the *Snark*, after sailing on the Saturday morning, put back that night and anchored off the mouth of the river. Captain Keeling put off in a boat by himself, was absent for two or three hours, and eventually returned—alone—in a state of great excitement, or emotion of some kind? Two days later Morden's body is found on the shore opposite the place where the *Snark* anchored, smashed all to pieces by the most violent blows—anyone will tell you that Keeling was a strong and violent man—almost unrecognizable, with all his possessions in his pockets, including his pocket-book with treasury notes in it—but the £6,000 missing.

"Isn't it obvious what happened? Keeling went ashore and killed his fellow-conspirator and dropped his body into the sea from his boat. What could be safer? The whole scheme was laid against Charles Morden—I assume that he knew all about it—but it had lacked

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a body. Now it should have one. He took the £6,000, and was clever enough to leave the pocket-book with plenty of money in it. Who would know that there had ever been a £6,000—except, perhaps, Mrs. Morden, and she obviously wouldn't be in a hurry to speak—not at any rate till he had had time to get clear. He went on to Rum Row, intending to sell his cargo and clear with the whole amount—£14,000. But by bad luck the *Snark* was nabbed by the Prohibition police. They let him escape, probably bribed by the rum-runners. That lot'll never catch him. But I've sent young Fairbanks over to get on to his track with one of Pinkerton's men. He's the fellow that nosed out all about this ramp of Mrs. Morden's, and a good deal about the banking account and the smuggling, and found out about the bus ticket—proved that Morden wasn't killed on the day we all thought he was. He'll run down Keeling—your murderer. He'll . . .”

“Oh, no, no!”

Lilith Morden had sprung to her feet. Her face was distraught, her hand beat violently against a box on the desk before her.

“Not him, too! Don't hound down another man! How blind you all are! Can't you see that my husband killed himself?”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE WHOLE TRUTH

"KILLED himself?"

The exclamation was simultaneous from all four men. Turnbull was the first to follow it up.

"How could he have killed himself?" he asked, in amazement.

"Oh, I don't know how he did it; I only know he did."

"But the—the injuries? He couldn't have done them to himself. He was terribly mutilated."

"I suppose they were done by a ship, when his body was in the water. The screw might have hit him."

As soon as he had recovered from his surprise at Mrs. Morden's astonishing statement, the Chief Constable looked at Superintendent Dodd to see how he was taking it. The latter, however, though he also had been startled into an exclamation, did not now show any great bewilderment or excitement. Rather there was an expression of amused contempt on his heavy features. Evidently he was not proposing to take a hand at this stage, and Major Waring considered it advisable

to do so himself rather than leave matters in the hands of Charles Morden's solicitor.

"I suppose, madam," he said, "that you have some reason for saying that. On the face of things it appears very improbable. What makes you think that your husband killed himself?"

Lilith, the momentary excitement of her revelation over, had quickly dropped back into her listless manner, though it was evident that she was by no means the mistress of herself that she had been at the beginning of the interview. She was still in a nervous condition, but seemed to regret having let herself—and her secret—go.

"Isn't it your business to find things out?" she replied. "I've given you a hint. I can't do more than that."

"You most certainly can," said Waring, who realized that firmness would do more good now than tact. "And, in fact, you must do so. You have made a definite statement affecting the case we are considering. We are bound to investigate your statement. Now, please, what are your grounds for saying that your husband killed himself?"

Lilith gave him an angry look and appeared on the point of refusing to answer. Then, quite suddenly, her expression changed. Her face looked haggard again, her spirit was evidently exhausted.

"Oh, all right," she said. "I suppose I must tell you. He sent me that money."

"What money?"

"The money Mr. Turnbull was talking about. The £6,000 he drew out of the Manchester bank."

"But when did he send it you?"

"On the Monday morning after he was supposed to have been killed—at least, that was when I got it. I suppose it must have been posted on Sunday or Saturday."

"Was there any letter with it?" asked Waring.

"Just a scrap of paper with the words 'Good-bye' on it."

"In his handwriting?"

"Yes."

"But did you know then that your husband was dead?"

"No, of course, I didn't. I couldn't understand why he had sent me the money, and I thought 'Good-bye' just referred to his going away. When the detective told me that his body had been found I was absolutely astounded. But I realized then what the 'Good-bye' meant."

"Have you got the letter here?"

"No, I haven't. I didn't mean to tell you about it. I only meant to tell about the hoax on Charles, so that you should let him out."

"You have it at your house?"

"Yes."

"And the money?"

"Yes."

"How was it sent? Were the notes sent, do you mean, or a cheque?"

"The notes. Ten £500 notes, I think, and the rest hundreds and fifties."

"Sent in an envelope?"

"Yes; a large one."

"Registered?"

"No."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Turnbull.

"You haven't changed the notes?"

"No. How could I? I thought you would be looking out for the numbers. What will happen? Will you take them?"

"Only for the time being, madam. They are, of course, your property, unless it is proved that they were not properly come by. We needn't go into that now."

Superintendent Dodd leant forward.

"Do I understand, madam," he said, "that you believe your husband was alive on the Saturday or Sunday?"

"I suppose he must have been. The letter must have been sent either Saturday or Sunday."

"How can you tell that? By the postmark?"

"No, the postmark is smudged. But it reached me on Monday morning, so it must have been posted on one of those days, I suppose."

Dodd leant back again. There was a thoughtful frown on his face. The old man at the Battery had



certainly given him the impression that the cottage next to him had only been occupied on the Friday night.

Turnbull had been listening all this time in great perplexity. He had been so certain of his theory about Captain Keeling, and he could not see that there was yet any proof of suicide. Of course, the sending back of the money was difficult to explain in any other way, and the police seemed to be impressed. The Chief Constable was evidently taking it seriously, and Dodd looked a good deal puzzled. Mr. Mildmay seemed to have taken it as settled; he looked quite relieved, as if glad to find that at least one dreadful thing—the crime of the murder—had not happened after all. The solicitor would have liked to ask some questions himself, but the Chief Constable now took up the running again.

“But why should your husband have killed himself?” he asked.

Lilith was silent for a moment.

“I don’t quite know why he should have,” she said at last. “I think he must have gone a little bit off his head. He had worked himself into a great state about all this business, and he had been drinking a good deal. Of course, something may have gone wrong that I don’t know about. He may have thought that the whole plan had failed, or that he was ruined, or something. He used to get the most frightful fits of depression about it all at times. And, of course, he had worked

himself up into the most ridiculous state about Charles."

"But why? There wasn't any real ground for jealousy there, was there?"

Lilith would have snorted, if she had been capable of anything so ungraceful.

"Good God, no!" she said. "It was about money and the business. You see, old Charles Morden had bought out James's father and he left the whole thing to his adopted son—Charles. James only had a life interest. He was wild about it—an outsider being brought in over his head. And, of course, as it was only for his life time, it was no use to me after he was dead. I believe he would really have liked Charles to be hanged—that was why he was so keen on working up the faked case against him."

"Dear, dear, how dreadful," said Mr. Mildmay, speaking almost for the first time. "Fancy Mr. James doing a thing like that. I can hardly credit it."

Nobody took any notice of this contribution and the manager relapsed once more into silence. His mind, however, was evidently much relieved at the turn affairs were taking.

"He was always thinking of fresh ways of incriminating Charles," continued Lilith. "Little clues that would tell against him—that blood on the quay, for instance, where they had almost been seen quarrelling together."

"And the weight thrown into the water," interposed Turnbull.

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"And Mr. Charles's handkerchief round his own ankle!" added Mr. Mildmay. "How diabolical!"

Superintendent Dodd had been for some time lost in his own thoughts. Mildmay's words seemed only to filter through to his brain. The conversation was continuing when he looked across at the manager, and his eyes slowly widened in amazement. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but emitted only a deep breath, almost a grunt. His little eyes began to sparkle with excitement.

". . . the insurance company pay up over his life policy if they know . . ." Lilith was saying, when the detective leant forward across Turnbull and unceremoniously shot a question at the manager.

"How do you know the body had one of Charles Morden's handkerchiefs on the ankle?"

There was a sudden silence. All eyes turned first to the detective and then to the dead white face of the little manager. Stark fear shone in those wide, staring eyes; terror, despair were drawn indelibly in every line of the haggard face.

"I . . . I . . . the papers . . . you said . . ." the words died away in a gasping stammer.

Closer still to its victim thrust the eager, hungry face of the detective.

"Does that bloody towel in the roof point to Charles Morden?" he snarled.

Mildmay staggered to his feet.

"Why do you ask me that? How should I . . . ?"

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The frail figure swayed, the hands clutched at the desk in front of them, and Herbert Mildmay crumpled quietly up into a heap on the floor.

Dodd stood over him, panting, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched, like a too eager boxer waiting to deliver another knock-down blow.

The Chief Constable laid a restraining hand on his subordinate's arm.

"Steady, Dodd," he said. "What does this mean? Are you going to charge him? If so, you must caution him."

"I can't charge him yet, sir. I've got no case against him. But I shall have!" said Dodd eagerly. "Not a soul knows about that handkerchief except you and me and the murderer! The laundry people identified it, but they don't know where it came from. I've kept the thing up my sleeve all along—I wasn't happy about it—it was so damned obvious. This explains it. This little hound must have put it there himself to incriminate Charles Morden—and he's forgotten that nobody was told about it, and he's given himself away."

"Well, we must get him round now, I suppose, anyway," said the Chief Constable. "He's gone right off. Get some brandy, Dodd." He turned to Lilith. "I don't know, Mrs. Morden, that we need detain you now," he said stiffly. "I shall be obliged if you will keep to yourself what you have just seen and heard. I will communicate with you again about what you have told us."

He walked to the door and held it open. Lilith, who had sat staring vacantly at the empty chair at the foot of which lay Herbert Mildmay, himself concealed from her by the writing table, rose slowly to her feet, looked round her at the hostile faces of the three men, and walked unsteadily out of the room.

"There goes a devil, if ever I saw one," said Waring, as he closed the door behind her. Turnbull said nothing. His mind was wholly occupied by this second and most startling and complete upheaval of all his ideas. Where on earth did Mildmay come into this story? How could he possibly have done this dreadful act of savagery? And why? What could he gain by it? The questions chased each other through his brain.

In the meantime Dodd had returned with a glass of brandy and was kneeling down beside the limp body of the manager.

"What'll you do with him, Dodd?" asked the Chief Constable.

"Question him. Put him right through it," replied the detective grimly, pouring brandy between the blue lips. Mildmay stirred; a fleck of colour came back into his cheeks. His eyes opened, staring vacantly at first, then wildly round at the towering figures above him. He shut them again and groaned.

"Oh, God!" he whimpered. "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Dodd put his arms under the manager's shoulders and lifted him roughly up on to the chair. He sat crumpled, whimpering, abject.

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"Take another drink," said the detective brusquely, thrusting the glass under Mildmay's nose.

The poor wretch sipped at the brandy, then thrust it from him with a shudder. He looked at Dodd, with the petrified stare of a rabbit faced by a stoat. The detective hitched up a chair.

"Now, Herbert Mildmay," he said. "You'll answer me some questions."

Mildmay tore his eyes away and turned them appealingly to Waring.

"I can't," he said hoarsely. "I can't face it. Don't let him. I'll tell everything."

"You'd better think what you're doing, Mildmay," said the Chief Constable. "You've not been charged. But if you make a statement, it'll be taken down in writing, and you'll have to sign it. Then, if you are tried, it can be used as evidence."

"I know, sir. I know what it means. But it's no use my fighting now—he'd get me now he knows where to look. I'll be glad to get rid of the suspense; it's been killing me. I'm not as wicked as you think, sir, though, of course, I've done wrong, but I couldn't help the worst part. I'd like to tell, sir, if you'll get it taken down."

After the necessary preparations had been made, Herbert Mildmay, now much more calm, told his story.

"It all began with this smuggling game of Mr. James's, sir. Of course, I found out about it. I needn't bother you now with how I found out, but I'm an accountant and money talks to me. I told Mr.

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James I'd found out. I remonstrated with him. He offered to take me into partnership—not in Morden and Morden—he had no power to do that—but in Hallington's. I wouldn't at first, but I was in great difficulties for money. I've always given my daughter the best bringing-up a girl could have—a good nurse, a governess, school, clothes—everything to make her a lady. She was all I had, all I lived for, and once I'd started I couldn't stop. I'd had to borrow money to pay for her college and tutoring, and since trade's been bad my dividends haven't come in properly—I couldn't afford trust securities. At last I had to agree; he gave me fifteen per cent. on the net profits—it made all the difference to me.

"Everything went all right till he suddenly made up his mind to leave the country. You know all about that—as much as I do, anyhow. It was a blow to me; it meant my money would stop, and I didn't know what would happen to the business. I hoped Mr. Charles would still be able to carry on, even with the loss of the *Snark*—they were going to sell that in America for what they could get, after getting rid of the whisky. It would have been a dead loss to the business, and, of course, there would have been the scandal. Still, I hoped Mr. Charles would pull it together again—he's a steady young man.

"Of course, I didn't know what Mr. James was planning to do about him—about pretending he'd murdered him. He only told me he was going to pretend



he'd been drowned—by suicide or accident. I knew he'd taken the cottage at Formby—I'd been out there once with him to see it. I was to go there on the Friday night—the night after he disappeared, that is—to tell him how things were going and to get my money. He had promised me £500 as a final payment. I had to wait, of course, till my daughter was asleep before I could leave the house, and at one time I began to think it would be difficult to get away at all. It was the day, you see, when all the excitement began and my daughter brought that young Fairbanks back to supper, and then they went off to see the Superintendent here about their idea that Mr. James was a stowaway on the *Snark*—a very shrewd idea it was, and I was a great deal put out by it and tried to stop them going. But young people are always obstinate nowadays, and they went—and did a good deal of harm, from the point of view of Mr. James's plan. However, they were back quite early, and I managed to pack young Fairbanks off at ten, and Helen up to bed. I was afraid the excitement might keep her awake, but it didn't. I peeped into her room a little before eleven and she was asleep.

"I let myself out of the house, got out my cycle and rode through quiet streets out of the city and on to Formby. When I got to the cottage at the Battery I saw at once that there might be trouble. Mr. James had been drinking. There was a bottle of whisky on the table beside him and he was very friendly and very offensive in turns. He started by boasting of how

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clever he'd been and told me how he'd planned to bring suspicion on his partner. I was horrified, but I couldn't stop him. So I thought I'd better just give him the news and then get away. I told him about young Fairbanks and my daughter having gone to the police with their idea about the *Snark*, and he burst into a great rage and stormed about, saying the most disgusting things about my daughter. That set me off—you know, Mr. Turnbull, how much my daughter is to me. I answered him back rather rudely, I'm afraid. I told him to give me my money, and I'd go, and didn't want ever to see him again. He swore at me then and said he'd be dashed—or something like that—if he'd give me a penny. I told him he was a swindler and a thief, and he picked up a chair and rushed at me.

"I tried to jump back out of the way, but caught my foot in something and fell. It was lucky I did, because I think the chair would have hit me if I hadn't. As it was it crashed on to the table and two of the legs broke clean off. I was terrified. I scrambled up and snatched the poker—a heavy thing—out of the fireplace. He had turned and was coming at me again with the broken chair, when I struck him. I meant to hit him on the head, but I struck just too soon, and the end of the poker caught him in the eye and knocked it right out. It was a dreadful sight—I dream of it now—the eye hung right down on his cheek and blood trickled out of the socket. He bellowed with pain and rushed at me. I dodged and struck him again—on the

nose. I felt it scrunch under the poker, and again the blood burst out all over him. He staggered, and as he stumbled I hit him again on the back of the head, and he collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"That sobered me, so to speak; I realized what I had done. I thought he was dead, and I was just kneeling down to make sure when suddenly he heaved over and grabbed at me. I jumped back just in time; if he'd caught me, he had strength enough left to strangle me—I'm not a strong man. I shall never forget that moment—the thing I thought was dead suddenly heaving up with a sort of gurgle and clutching at me—that dreadful face, too, covered in blood and almost shapeless. I was terrified out of my wits and—as I believe people often do when they're frightened of a thing—I struck at it wildly again and again, hardly knowing what I was doing. Presently I realized that he had fallen on his face again, and that I was smashing at the back of his head. There couldn't be any doubt that he was dead now—the poker was a heavy one. But I was so frightened that I daren't go near him. I backed away and watched him. I found I was exhausted and I sank on to a chair and sat watching him for a long time. I drank some whisky out of the bottle—rather a lot for me, I think. It made a great difference—it pulled me together.

"I went across to him and made sure that he was dead. Then I sat down again and thought what I must do. I suppose if I'd come straight to you, sir,

and told about it, I might have got off fairly lightly, because it was 'self-defence,' but I hadn't the courage to do it—you see, I should have had to explain all about the smuggling, too—it would have been awful for my Helen. So I tried to think of a way out. At once what he'd just told me about his plan to incriminate Mr. Charles came back to me—there was the whole thing cut and dried. I had only to supply the body to make it perfect. I could pull it down to the sea, let the tide take it out and float it ashore again, somewhere. But I couldn't do it—I couldn't get Mr. Charles in such dreadful trouble.

"I decided at last to hide the body and only to let it be found if things went wrong—I hoped that, if no body were found, Mr. Charles couldn't be accused of murder. So I just took out of his pocket-book the money—all but a few treasury notes that I left to make it look natural—and put them in my pocket. Then I dragged the body down to the sea and sank it with some heavy stones in the channel—it runs narrow there between the shore and Jordan Bank. I tied a piece of rope round it and left the end tied to a stone in shallow water. Then I went back to the cottage, tidied it up, washed the blood off the tiled floor with a towel, and hid the towel in the roof. Then I cycled back home.

"I had an awful time for the next two or three days, not knowing how things would go. For one thing, I didn't know what to do with the money. I was terrified that my house would be searched and that it would

be found. I didn't want to keep it—apart from the £500 that had been promised me. There was about £500 in treasury notes—I believe he had got them together by degrees—and they were safe enough. But the bank notes were no use to me even if I wanted to keep them—the police might be looking out for their numbers. They belonged to Mrs. Morden, as next of kin, so at last I decided to send them to her. I couldn't register them, of course. So I just put them in an ordinary envelope and posted them. It had occurred to me to suggest suicide in case the case against Mr. Charles fell through. That was why I wrote 'Good-bye' in Mr. James's handwriting—I could do that easily enough, I knew his writing so well. It was on the Saturday night I did that. I really hadn't made up my mind then whether to make it look like suicide or Mr. Charles.

"By Sunday I felt more hopeful that nothing could be proved either against me or Mr. Charles, but on Monday evening I heard from my daughter that that young Fairbanks had been nosing round Mr. James's bank in Manchester. I realized then that, if I didn't distract attention, they would find out about the Hallington business and probably my connexion with it. So I decided to pull the body out. I'd thought out all about what to do. I slipped out again at night, cycled out to Hightown, hid my cycle under a bridge over the river, and walked across the foreshore down to the Formby Channel. I found the rope all right, pulled the body up and towed it down the channel, keeping in

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the water myself so as to leave no footprints, nearly as far as the mouth of the Alt. It must have been nearly two miles and it half killed me.

"The tide was coming in and I pushed the body up to what I thought would be high-water mark, keeping in the water myself all the time. I should say that before I started I had tied on to one of the ankles that handkerchief of Mr. Charles. Mr. James had taken it himself some time on purpose to tie to the bar of iron he was going to throw into the dock, but at the last moment, he told me, he had changed his mind, thinking it might look too obvious. It seems he was right, and I was wrong. I left the body there and walked on, still in the water, to the mouth of the Alt; then waded all the way up the river as far as the bridge where I had left my cycle. When I got out of the water I was more dead than alive; I could hardly manage to pedal myself home.

"I had a job to know what to do with my boots, they were in such a state from the water. My trousers didn't matter, because I look after my clothes myself, but the boots are done by the girl. I had to tell my daughter that I was taking them to be repaired—fortunately they were an old pair, so she didn't think it odd—and I just hid them. Otherwise, everything was quite simple. Nobody seemed to think of me. Perhaps they never would have, if I hadn't said that silly thing about the handkerchief. I was so delighted at Mrs. Morden bringing up the suicide idea that it put



me off my guard and I said that, I suppose, just to encourage the idea.

"I'm glad now that I did. It's a great relief to get it off my mind. You'll understand, gentlemen, that it's been a very trying time for me, very trying—with all this questioning going on right under my very nose, so to speak, and having to be so careful not to say anything that would give me away. And I've been unhappy, too, about Mr. Charles—getting him into trouble, I mean. I didn't really think the police would prove anything against him—I hoped that, if he were tried, he'd get off. I don't think I should have let him be hung; I hope not. Well, gentlemen, I think that's all I can tell you."

Having finished his tale, Herbert Mildmay looked rather pathetically round to see what effect it had made upon his hearers. Their expressions were strangely indeterminate. Bewilderment, surprise, even horror, were evident enough, but he could discover neither disgust nor contempt. On Turnbull's face he thought he could even find a hint of something not far removed from admiration.

He sighed and turned his eyes again to the Chief Constable.

"Well, sir; I'm ready," he said.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### WELL OUT OF IT

WHEN the necessary formalities had been complied with, the stenographer's notes amplified into long hand, the statement signed, the formal arrest made, Herbert Mildmay was led away to await the slow but inevitable process of the Law that would determine the extent of his guilt and the severity of his punishment. As the door closed on him, Major Waring turned to the solicitor.

"Well," he said. "What do you think of that chap?"

Turnbull slowly shook his head.

"I hardly know," he replied. "It's an appalling shock. He's the last man I should have suspected. And yet—as he told it—it all seems to have been so inevitable. I'm not sure I don't feel a little sympathy for him—even a little admiration. He was fighting for his daughter; he came up against a sudden crisis that would have unnerved a lot of men; he had an awful experience, and he kept his head. A lot of what he did was wicked, but some of it was rather fine."

"That's his version, of course," said the Chief Con-

stable. "We've still got to prove how much of it is true. As you say, he kept his head. So well, that I'm not sure he isn't a cold and scheming villain. For all we know, he may have planned the whole thing from the very beginning—the smuggling, the plot against Charles Morden, the actual killing of James. I don't like the look of it."

But Turnbull shook his head. That was not the father of Helen. A sinner, perhaps, under stress, but no cold-blooded fiend. However, Turnbull realized that the Chief Constable must have much to do, so he did not stop to argue the point. He took his leave, and was on his way out of the building when, happening to pass Superintendent Dodd's room, he saw through the open door the burly form of the detective standing by the window. He turned into the room and shut the door.

"I'm just going, Dodd," he said, "but there's one thing I wanted to ask you about—if you can spare me five minutes."

"I expect there is—more than one thing," replied Dodd, with a grin. "But I don't know that I shall be able to tell you. This has been what you might call a 'book-maker's race,' Mr. Turnbull; we've none of us been on the winner."

The Superintendent's sense of humour did not always appeal to Turnbull, but the latter wanted information, so he concealed his irritation.

"I wanted to ask you about this Hallington business,"

he said. "Have you been into that at all? Fairbanks and I talked it over and there were one or two points that rather puzzled us. In the first place, Income Tax returns? Figgs said that they faked sales to imaginary customers, so as to account for the whisky that they bought—whereas they were really sending it to Van Diemen. We don't follow how they could have faked them. The names in their books, bills, and so on—yes, that seems possible, but what about the payments? How would those appear in their accounts? They could hardly have faked cheques from these fictitious customers—what about the banks that would have to clear the cheques? Can you in any way explain that?"

Turnbull looked enquiringly at the detective, but the latter only said:

"What were your other points, sir?"

"Well, the principal point to my mind is the question of profit. Figgs said they cleared about £1,000 a trip—or £3,000 a year. That sounds all right, but that wasn't clear profit. That was only the difference between the price they got for the whisky and the price they paid for it. Out of that you've got to take the overhead expenses—the rent of the warehouse, rates and taxes, Figgs' salary and his sons', the lorry, Keeling's share—that must have been considerable. Of course, the ordinary business they did—the above-board business—covered a good deal of that, but not all. That £3,000 must have been pretty nearly halved, and I

don't see Morden taking all that risk for £1,500 a year—and incidentally paying Mildmay, as we now know, a percentage to keep his mouth shut. What do you make of that?"

He paused again.

"That all, sir?" asked the detective.

"Those are the principal points."

Dodd chuckled.

"And pretty good ones, too, Mr. Turnbull. I'm afraid our friend, Benjamin Figgs, wasn't quite frank with you."

He chuckled again, and the lawyer began to feel uncomfortable.

"I can tell you a bit more about Mr. Figgs and his business," said the Superintendent, settling himself into his chair and stuffing his pipe with coarse shag, "but I can't tell you everything—not by a long chalk. The Chief told me to look into your yarn about Hallington, though it ran contrary to our ideas. I couldn't get round to Hallington's till evening—Wednesday evening, that was—twenty-four hours after you'd been there. I took a man from the Customs with me—the Chief wanted them told. The nest was empty—Figgs and his two sons had flown. We had to break in. The place was full of groceries, including jam and pickles, and stocks of empty jam and pickle bottles, all carefully washed out. Evidently that part of the story was all right. There was a certain amount of whisky in bottles—Robertson's and others—but nothing much.

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There were a dozen or more large empty casks, though—all smelling of whisky.

"That made this Customs fellow very excited. There wasn't a drop left in the casks, but he smelt them and licked them and said he believed it was Robertson's, but he couldn't be certain. In any case, what was it doing in casks? We rang up Robertson's agent and asked him to look up Hallington's orders, either through him or at the head office, and come round to us with the result. He was round in twenty minutes. All Hallington's orders had been through him—none had been made direct to the head office. And they were very moderate orders—nothing like the amount Figgs spoke of—and he told you that it was mostly Robertson's, didn't he?"

"He certainly did."

"Well, this agent of Robertsons did his sniffing and licking act, too, and swore it wasn't their stuff, though it was mighty like it. What's more, he didn't know what it was. He said he was a connoisseur and knew every whisky that was distilled, but he couldn't make out what this was. It was quite good stuff, though, and fairly well matured. That excited the Customs fellow again. He said that his people and Scotland Yard had got wind of a big illicit distilling plant that had been working for years and turning out matured whisky—and they hadn't been able to put their fingers on it. This might be it, and it was a clue that might lead them to the still."

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"By Jove!" said Turnbull, "an illicit still! That explains a lot! And that's what Figgs' van was for—he told me one of his sons drove a light motor van for Hallington's in his spare time—loading up at the ship, he said it was for; no doubt, it went out to collect these casks from somewhere. You ought to be able to trace the still through that."

"Not my job now," said Dodd, rather discontentedly. "We came back here and had a talk with the Chief. The Customs fellow wanted us to hand the case over—that side of it—to Scotland Yard. They've had men on it for months, if not years. He said it was a much wider job than Liverpool. The Chief agreed, and it's out of our hands now. I don't know what they'll make of it—not much, I shouldn't wonder. Figgs hadn't left any papers or any line that I could find, bar the casks. I wonder he didn't get rid of them—he took the van. But perhaps he wanted that for his personal goods. He must have been a smart lad—I doubt if they'll catch him."

"I almost hope they won't," said Turnbull. "I liked the old fellow—he was full of sand."

"Anyhow, sir," said Dodd, "that explains your two points. If it was illicit whisky they were selling to Jamaica nothing had to go through their books so far as the Income Tax people were concerned. It just didn't appear. And it explains the profits, too. Illicit whisky doesn't pay duty! The Customs man and Robertson's agent thought this stuff, real good matured

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stuff, with a big risk attached, but no 8s. duty, would have cost Hallington—Morden, that is—anything from 6s. to 8s. a bottle. Put it at 7s.—84s. a case; Morden was getting 174s. a case from Van Diemen; that's a clear profit of 90s., or £2,250 per 500 case trip, or just on £7,000 a year. That's talking!"

"My God, it is! That accounts for his being able to invest money as well as to live up to the figures given by Figgs. But these figures! Look here, Dodd, let's get this down on paper—can you spare five minutes?"

The detective's answer was to push a sheet of foolscap and a pencil in front of Turnbull, and to pull up a chair to the desk beside him. Turnbull sat down and began to scribble.

"Now then," he said:

- "(a) Hallington buys illicit whisky at 84s. a case, or £2,100 a trip, or £6,300 a year.
- (b) Hallington sells it to Van Diemen at 174s. a case, or £4,350 a trip, or £13,050 a year.
- (c) Van Diemen pay openly for pickles at the rate of about £500 a trip, or £1,500 a year. (I found that out the other day, Dodd; pickles are about 20s. a dozen.) That would go into the Hallington business account.
- (d) Therefore, Keeling would have to bring back the balance, *i. e.*, £3,850 a trip, or £11,550 a year, in dollars, and hand that over to Morden.
- (e) Of that £3,850 Keeling would take something, say, £350, for his own share, so that the actual



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amount Morden would have to pay into his private account in Manchester would be £3,500 a trip, or £10,500 a year.

- (f) Out of that Morden had to pay the distillers £6,300 a year (see paragraph *a*), probably in monthly payments of about £500.
- (g) He would also out of it have to pay Mildmay his percentage—fifteen per cent. on net profits, wasn't it? What net profits? Probably on the £3,000 a year given by Figs—I doubt if Mildmay knew of the illicit whisky figures. Say, £450 a year.
- (b) That leaves Morden £3,750 a year for himself.
- (i) Of that he apparently drew about £150 a month or £1,700 a year for himself, leaving £2,000 a year to be invested, or £6,000 in the three years the smuggling lasted. That pretty well tallies with the sum his brokers paid in to his Manchester account at the end of March after realizing his securities.
- (j) In addition to all that he would have the net profits of the legitimate Hallington business, probably nearly £2,000 a year, entirely to himself.
- (k) So it amounts to this, that James Morden got out of this smuggling something like £3,700 a year to be spent and £2,000 a year to be invested. It's colossal."

Superintendent Dodd nodded his head ponderously.

## WELL OUT OF IT

"They're big figures, sir. I don't know . . ."

"They are big, but are they right? How do we know that he really got 174s. a case from Van Diemen? We've only got Figg's word for that, and he was deceiving us about the whisky being illicit. If it wasn't Robertson's or some well-known make, would these rich Americans have bought it?"

"I don't see why we should doubt that, sir. They'd been drinking nothing but raw fire for a year or more. This stuff—good, matured whisky, it's admitted—must have tasted real Highland Dew to them. I'll bet they lapped it down and paid their ten or twelve dollars a bottle without a murmur. They've been double-crossed, but if they don't know it, who's sorry?"

"I'm not," said Turnbull, with a laugh.

"Nor I," echoed Dodd. "But look here, sir. There's a point I wanted to ask you. You told us that that last cargo of the *Snark* was being taken by Keeling straight to Rum Row to be sold there direct to the rum-runners instead of going to Kingston, as before. How did you know that?"

Turnbull laughed.

"I don't know it," he said, "but isn't it obvious? The ship was captured in Rum Row, apparently red-handed. Morden and Keeling were breaking up their smuggling business and doing a bolt. Obviously they had decided on their last trip to cut out the middleman and make an extra big profit. I think that's clear enough."

He rose and held out his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Superintendent," he said. "You've told me enough to keep me quiet for a bit. I don't think—oh, yes, there is though. Will you tell me now why you were so confident that Keeling hadn't killed Morden."

The detective looked at him for a moment in silence; then a smile stole over his face.

"I'm not sure that's not asking for state secrets," he said. "But I think you'll keep it to yourself. All along, after I'd found the body, I had a suspicion that it hadn't been washed ashore—that it had been put there, perhaps, out of a boat. But if that was so, it hadn't been done by a sailor."

"Why not?"

"Because the head was level with high water-mark. If the body had been washed ashore, would it have got as far as the lightest foam went? Wouldn't it have stopped some way below high water-mark? That's what I asked myself, and a sailor would have known the answer."

Dodd delivered himself of a knowing wink.

"Good God!" exclaimed Turnbull. "Do you mean to say you knew all along that the body hadn't been washed ashore?"

"Just a theory of mine, sir; that's all."

"But you did know! And yet you went on with the case against Charles Morden. You didn't care so long as you got a conviction!"

## WELL OUT OF IT

But Superintendent Dodd drew himself up with dignity.

"I don't take your meaning, Mr. Turnbull," he said. "The police are out to arrive at the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

\* \* \* \* \*

Turnbull had undertaken to break the terrible news of her father's arrest to Helen Mildmay. We need not spy upon that sad occasion, but can assume that William Turnbull carried out his difficult task with all the sympathy and understanding that love engenders. For Turnbull realized now—when he saw for the first time a sad and sober Helen—that he loved deeply and sincerely this girl whom at first he had regarded merely as a pretty and amusing companion. During the days that followed they saw much of each other, for Helen had now few real friends to whom to turn—her many acquaintances walked delicately afar off now that she was in trouble.

Turnbull, however, was not Helen's only friend, for Charles Morden, released immediately after Herbert Mildmay's disclosures had been verified, did his utmost to lighten her anxiety by helping, unobtrusively, in the preparations for her father's defence. As soon as he learnt that Mildmay intended to adhere to his confession and would only plead for a reduction of the charge to one of manslaughter, Morden asked Turnbull to undertake the manager's defence, and Turnbull, after some rather natural hesitation, consented.

## THE MISSING PARTNERS

At his very first interview with his new client, however, the lawyer received a shock that caused him to regret his decision. The two men had been through the whole story again, and Turnbull was feeling more than ever how difficult it was to judge the actions of one's fellow-men, when a sudden thought struck him.

"I say!" he exclaimed, "did you have anything to do with the accident to that sailor—Dorking, or whatever his name was?"

Mildmay turned faintly red. He did not reply at once, but after a time shook his head and said, with a sigh:

"I hoped you wouldn't ask me that, sir, but it's no use my denying it. I feel very sad about that poor young man, very sad indeed. I take that much more hardly than I do the other business. But it couldn't be helped. You see, sir, he came back with a story that would have directed everyone's attention to the *Snark*, and to the day and the place where the death really took place—and just when everyone or, at any rate, the police—seemed nicely set on the false date and place. He met me quite by accident in the town and told me that story about the *Snark* putting back. For some reason I jumped to the conclusion that he hadn't told anyone else—he said he had just got back and had gone straight to the office, but they told him I was in the town.

"I saw at once that that story mustn't get out, but I didn't know what to do to stop it. It just happened that, while we were talking, we had wandered down to

a lonely part of the docks and the thought did cross my mind that I should have to use force. Just as I was thinking that, he stopped and stooped to do up a boot-lace. Would you believe it, sir, but at that very spot there was a little pile of lead piping ends—like as in Abraham's story, sir, if you take me—only there it was a ram. Well, I'm afraid I picked one up and hit the poor young man on the back of the head. I had to leave him there, of course; it wouldn't have done for me to have been seen in connexion with such a thing.

"You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Turnbull, when my daughter told me next morning that she'd heard the whole story from him before he met me! All the risk and a life taken for nothing. And then it came out that he wasn't dead, but only very badly hurt and unconscious—fractured base of the skull, I think they called it. Of course, that meant the risk—on top of all the rest—that he would come to, and tell about being with me. I saw I might have to go away at any moment, and I made plans to do so—it was very sad, the idea of having to leave my work and my daughter—I couldn't ask her to come with me—a fugitive from justice. But I soon learnt that there wasn't any immediate risk of his coming to. Him being in our employ, it was quite natural for me to go down to the hospital and enquire. He's still unconscious, they tell me; I'm afraid there's very little hope for him. Poor young man!"

As he listened to the story, a cold feeling of dismay

crept over Turnbull. It was so calmly told, the sentiment so glibly smooth. Could Waring have been right? Was this man really a cold-blooded monster? Or was it sheer childish *naïveté*? He knew that such a story, if it came out in court, would inevitably damn his client in the eyes of a jury. But would it come out? The police had no inkling about it and it was no duty of his to "put them wise."

He took a rather abrupt and non-committal leave and spent the evening thinking over the problem. He could consult nobody—not even Charles Morden. It would not be fair to burden anybody else's conscience with such a secret. He wished heartily that Herbert Mildmay had lied to him about it (surely a point in his favour that he had not?), still more heartily that he had never asked. In the end, he decided to cut it right out of his mind, to act as if he had never known it. To retire now must be directly prejudicial to Mildmay's chances; not only would the effect on public opinion be bad, but the wretched little man, if he were really as naïve as he appeared, was quite likely to blurt the story out to Turnbull's successor in the defence, and the successor might have a less hardened or accommodating conscience. Finally, for Helen's sake. . . .

That, of course, settled it. For Helen's sake he would commit crimes far less venal than this. He loved her; he could not hurt her. He adored her; he would face any dangers for her sake.

Singular reiteration! As Turnbull thought this



handsome and perfectly sincere, if rather melodramatic thought, in unconscious plagiarism, Tom Fairbanks—its originator—was stepping aboard a homeward bound liner in New York, full of hope for his reward. He had met with amazing success. Only that afternoon, after two days and nights spent in the picturesque but rather unconvincing underworld of the American capital, in company with Hiram P. Quackett, of Pinkerton's Detective Bureau, he had found Joseph Keeling, or rather he had found his dead body. The sailor had been desperately wounded in making his escape, but had lingered on until a few hours before the liberal employment of dollars brought Tom to his attic bedside. Tom felt bitterly disappointed at being baulked of a dying confession, but he realized that death was a second best—at least, there could be no denial of the charge. Tom had seen no newspaper; nobody had thought of cabling him the futility of his mission—and if they had, no cable would have reached him.

So it was that he set foot upon the S.S. *Pedantic* full of hope for the future. He had crossed the world, he had faced great dangers—at least, he hoped he had, though he felt uncomfortable doubts on the point—all for the sake of his lady love—for what cared he for Charles Morden? Now he was returning to claim his just reward. Disappointment, bitter and stunning, was in store for him. But who can say that the ultimate blessing did not await him?

THE END

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